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BRASS FACES

By Charles McEvoy





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BRASS FACES

BRASS FACES

BY

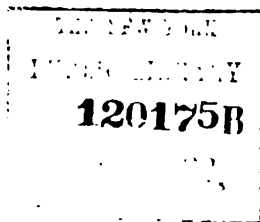
CHARLES MEEVOY

AUTHOR OF THE PLAYS: "DAVID BALLARD," "THE THREE
BARROWS," "WHEN THE DEVIL WAS ILL," "THE
VILLAGE WEDDING," "ALL THAT
MATTERS," ETC., ETC.

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TO
CURTIS BROWN

F

BRASS FACES

CHAPTER I

The First Day. The Girl at the Area Gate

ROBERT GILMOUR had passed Ebury Bridge and was within half-a-mile of his flat in St George's Square when he regretted that he had not taken the taxi-cab which had hailed him in Sloane Street.

It was three o'clock on the most sultry summer's morning that he could remember. It was probably near daylight, but one huge cloud had hung like a motionless pall over London all through the night. He had left the neighbourhood of Kensington after an unconscionably prolonged bachelor gathering, and, stifled and oppressed, had decided to walk home. But in the streets no breath of wind stirred, hardly one breath of air.

It had seemed at first a remarkable experience. Along by Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park a strange mist had hung over the railings, leaving the streets clear except for the gloom of the night and the black cloud. He had passed hardly a soul, and those few moved silently, like things that walk in their shrouds. Now, just near the Monster Tavern, came monstrous raindrops, evaporating as they fell, and the first gleam of lightning and muttering roll of thunder.

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The first of the great raindrops he welcomed, lifting his face, but within a dozen seconds came one of those phenomenal downpours, in which a heavy and absolutely perpendicular swirl of rain descends from the heavens as from a hose.

A few strides in it had soaked him, but being soaked he made a virtue of it and strode on, laughing at the extraordinary, exhilarating impetuosity of the happening, coming as it did instantly upon hours of utter inertia. The lightning played vividly, but he could hardly see it for the mass of descending water; the thunder crashed and detonated, but the very rush of the gutters drowned it. Out on the asphalt road, for it had become suddenly lighter, he could see the rain flung back into a thousand stud-shaped fountains.

Wearing the lightest of summer coats, the storm drenched him as completely as if he had plunged into water, but it was with a refreshing coolness that made even the disaster to his wardrobe welcome.

A very few words will portray Gilmour walking through the storm. He was thirty-two years of age, tall and slim, and, incorrectly, athletic-looking. He had a slightly cadaverous face, a small, closely cropped moustache, and hair that was already a little thin about the temples. He was good-looking and well-dressed, in a non-committal fashion, and appeared very much what he was: a man of some means and limitless leisure. To come to details, it should be briefly stated that he was the son of a deceased small brewer, and of his deceased large wife.

Somehow an intangible muddle had been made of his life; a fact of which he was vaguely, but not bitterly, conscious. A diagnosis was really quite



simple. His parents, dumbfounded by the actuality of possessing a child, had been incapable of regarding him as any human being. In fact, so strong was their presumption to the contrary, that he practically did not leave his mother's knee until at the age of twenty he arrived at Cambridge, a six-foot baby. Seriously alarmed by what he saw there, he returned swiftly, and feeling the need of something to do had joined one of the university clubs. One thing that he had learnt was a new sense of proportion. The brewery looked smaller and his mother larger than he had previously thought them, and he spent most of his time at the club. Finally, as an orphan with eight hundred a year and a new vacuum in his heart, he had furnished himself a flat, lived in it alone, and worked out bridge problems in the intervals between visiting his club and taking walking exercise.

It might be noted of Gilmour that his ideals were unimpaired because he had never meddled with them. He was devoid of any unique experience. The unacted adventure, however dull his past, coloured his future luminously.

He had avoided Ebury Street, with its sequence, Lupus Street, because he detested long, monotonous pavements, and chose to walk round about the very similar little Pimlico by-streets of plaster and portico. It was when he was half-way through with this detour that something across the roadway at first vaguely attracted his notice, and then commanded it.

The rain had only ceased by a few minutes, the gutters still ran with it, and the roofs dripped almost as if the storm was still in progress, yet at an area gate on the opposite side of the street was certainly a girl, standing motionless behind the railings, and

catching enough of the dripping rain to be rapidly getting wet through.

Gilmour walked on, though looking curiously towards her, and then, suddenly, she beckoned, beckoned with a hand that was thrust over the tall spiked ironwork. He hesitated a moment. The next, he found himself walking over to her.

In the pale light he could see that it was a very ordinary-looking girl indeed; and she seemed to be wearing nothing but a mackintosh over a night-dress, to judge from the way that her neck disappeared into the coat, and by the cuff of ragged lace that hung about her outstretched wrist. He could see light coarse hair rolled tightly on to the head with pins, and the smear of a half-washed face. It was a particularly poor specimen of the London servant girl apparently, yet she was certainly doing a rather surprising thing.

As Gilmour approached her, puzzled and decidedly hesitating, she stretched her hand still farther through the railings.

"Please, sir," she whispered quickly, "don't say anything, but do please post this letter."

"Post a letter?" asked Gilmour, pitching his own voice at a whisper, for the girl was looking back over her shoulder and about her, as if fearful of being overheard.

"Oh, do take it, sir," she exclaimed, in the same hurried underbreath. "There's someone in trouble here and I said I'd get it posted. There's no stamp, but if you'll just drop it in the box as it is, sir, she said it'd be all right."

"Who said?" asked Gilmour.

"She did, sir," answered the girl, thrusting the letter into Gilmour's hand. He took it, and even as he did

so she turned and went at a run down the area steps, the closing of a door and the drawing of a bolt following instantly upon her abrupt disappearance.

Left alone on the pavement he gazed in some astonishment first at the missive in his hand and then down into the now deserted basement, where dark pools of water still received the dripping rain. He put his hand up on the gate and found it encircled by a great chain and padlock. He noted, too, the shuttered basement window.

The house itself was of the usual Pimlico type of architecture, with a balcony over the front door supported by tall pillars, and on either of these was painted in black figures the number of the house—42.

"It's Childrey Street," he muttered. "Forty-two Childrey Street." And he walked out into the roadway.

With the letter still in his hand, he stood for some moments gazing up at the windows.

"Why on earth couldn't the servant girl have gone out and posted the letter the night before, or waited till the morning? She seemed, anyway, to have made an unnecessary mystery of it. It was pretty clear what it was, though. A harsh mistress, probably, and a letter of complaint written home. It was pretty sure to be only that, and the 'she' who had been mentioned was some mythical and artistic elaboration. Poor little devil!"

Such were Gilmour's soliloquies. He hated the sordid, and it was a habit of mind with him to account for disagreeable things in some slight fashion. Yet he did not like that locked area gate, nor the cowed manner of the girl who had stood behind it.

He shrugged his shoulders and turned to go. It was no business of his. He would post the letter and have done with it.

He was still out in the middle of the roadway, and had made only his first step from the place, when high up in the house a window was thrown suddenly up, and in the grey light of the dawn a withered woman's face thrust itself out and peered down at him.

Then came a harsh, rasping voice :

"What do you want down there? What are you looking at?"

Gilmour turned from the spot with almost a laugh.

"I'll get off," he said to himself, and walked on quickly, satisfied now with the theory of the disagreeable mistress.

Holding the letter all the time, he had thrust it, as he strode on, into a side pocket of his overcoat. When he remembered that this was much the same thing as holding it in a pail of water he took it out again, and with misgivings.

It was too late. In the dim light he could see that the ink had already run. The address was practically obliterated, and certainly the missive was no longer fit to go through the post.

At the same moment he heard the slamming-to of a letter-box down the road, and, starting forward, he saw the form of a postman making quickly off; disappearing a moment later around a corner of the street. Thus, even while he hesitated, the three-o'clock collection had been made, and now there was nothing for it but to take the letter home and decipher the address if he could. Then he would put it in another envelope and post it off. No doubt with a strong light he would be able to make the address out. He looked at it again at

the end of the street, and decided that it was probably just readable.

He was not then very far from his flat, but already he was beginning to feel chilled, and curiously dispirited. He always resisted being dispirited, with cultivated antagonism, and reaching his bachelor home he went at once to his dressing-room, putting the letter by. Presently he came back glowing from a cold plunge and enfolded in a warm dressing-gown. Then he made himself coffee, and finally, at about five o'clock, he went through to his sitting-room, switched on the electric light, and sat down comfortably at the table. He was in the mood now when it was rather pleasant to have anything puzzling to do, and he began to examine the letter and its address with a new interest.

As a matter of fact, he had very little difficulty with it, but he was surprised at once at the handwriting.

In spite of the wash of the ink he could see that it was particularly good writing, and he had expected, from an association of ideas, to find little more than a childish scrawl. He had quite decided that it was the servant girl's own epistle, and believing that her education would match her appearance, the almost exquisite calligraphy which confronted him was surprising. Nor was the address itself of the kind which he had, without actual thought about it, anticipated. What he read under the brilliant gleam of his reading-lamp was :

" Urgent.

HENRY LEES, Esq.,

Inkerman Grange,

Brentford."

It was the handwriting of a woman, undoubtedly,

but of the woman who had intercepted him at the area gate—no. He reflected that elementary school writing was probably quite good, but this writing had style. More even than that it had character, and suggested at once a peculiarly delicate sort of refinement. There was the woman at the window, certainly, but Gilmour dismissed that notion without any speculation at all. Here was the writing of neither the girl at the gate nor the woman at the window, and his interest deepened. "She said it would be all right." Who was she?

He looked again at the strangely delicate penstrokes, and the idea that it was a young hand that had drawn them forced itself upon him. And the more he looked at the writing the more curious and interested he became, until soon he asked himself the inevitable question of whether it might not be the right thing to open the epistle. Remembering the circumstances under which he had received it, the hint that had been given him of someone in trouble in that shuttered house, had there not been a combination of circumstances to, and perhaps dangerously, delay the message it contained? He had lost the three o'clock post, for instance. Now, if he opened the letter, and its message was indeed urgent, might he not make reparation by delivering it himself to Brenford, by a cab, at once?

He reasoned about these things for some time, and greatly hesitated. For instance, he might take the cab and deliver the letter, anyway. Yet, that was a step he hardly cared to take entirely in the dark. It might be something he didn't at all want to be mixed up with. True, he could probably leave it at Inker-man Grange without being noticed, but it was equally possible that the step would in some way mix him up

with something he would prefer not to run the faintest risk about. He knew the reputation of many of those houses back there in "South Belgravia," and would prefer to keep himself completely in the background. For all these reasons it seemed to him that he ought perhaps to make himself acquainted with what the letter contained.

It was when he discovered that the dampness had loosened the gum of the envelope, and that it would be no difficult matter to lift the flap, that he made his decision. He drew back the enfolding cover slowly and deliberately, took from it a single sheet of note-paper, and pulled the electric light standard closer to him.

In the same fine hand that had addressed the envelope, only with the writing running downward to sudden and clearly tremulous end, he read a dozen closely written lines :

"DEAR FATHER,—You will have heard from Eastbourne. I am sorry now. Of course it was Francis, so I suppose you were right, but I have not seen him again since he brought me here. I frightened him, and it is not too late. It is the house of the man Francis's mother. It is near Victoria Station, a house behind some mews, and I am in a room with a red blind to it. Whether you forgive me or not, I implore you to come to me at once, or, of course, I shall simply have got myself ruined.—IRIS."

Gilmour's eyes remained fixed for some moments upon the last word of all. Then he went back to his dressing-room and prepared to leave the house.

It was a letter to which he could hardly attribute

more than one meaning, and now he would reach this Henry Lees and deliver it in person, whatever the outcome.

"Iris." The name, and the curious, half-childish writing of it, stood out in front of him as he dressed himself for the street, and pausing once he went to the window and looked out beyond the grey gloom of the morning sky. Half consciously he conjured up the flower itself; a delicate bloom growing in the shade of a country garden. He thought of fragrance and sunshine and running streams. And then, like a setting to it, he saw again the Pimlico back street in the cold morning light, and the withered face at the window.

It was when he came back into the room, already in his overcoat, to fetch the letter, that the uses of the telephone for the first time occurred to him. One was installed in the very room, and he looked up the directory. It was just possible that he would strike Henry Lees there.

He did not find the name "Lees," but he found "Inkerman," and under the following entry :—

INKERMAN, Lord . . . 4020 P.O. Brentford. . . .
(Agent's Office, Inkerman Grange) 3037 P.O. Brentford.

Inkerman Grange was certainly the place the letter was addressed to, and he realised that in a few minutes now he might acquit himself of this altogether disturbing responsibility.

True, the Grange might happen to be an office only, and the telephone find no response at half-past five in the morning, but there was at least the chance that he would get through, and to Henry Lees.

He reached down the receiver and gave the number, realising that he was handling a decidedly delicate situation.

A long wait ensued. An impatient operator presently advised him to give the number up, but Gilmour sat listening, and presently there came an abrupt voice with an unmistakable Scotch accent.

"Hullo there!"

"Hullo," answered Gilmour. "Are you Mr. Henry Lees?"

"Who are you?"

"A stranger, sir. Are you Mr. Henry Lees?"

"Yes, I am. What do you want?"

"I have a message from your daughter."

There was a pause, and Gilmour fancied that he heard a muttered oath from the other end.

"What's that?" asked the voice.

"Your daughter Iris. She's in some trouble here in London, as perhaps you know."

"Who the devil are you, sir?"

"I tell you I'm a stranger, but I have a message. May I read a letter which has fallen into my hands? I am afraid it is very urgent."

Gilmour listened for the answer. He heard one imprecation as if hissed from the mouth, the next instant there was the snap of the receiver at the other end being replaced violently on to its carriage, and then his bell rang out a short, vibrating note. The man at the other end had rung off.

Gilmour had the sort of features that would make up well as Mephistopheles, and he wore something of the look as he hung up his own receiver. This telephone conversation had curiously roused him, and though he had not the least idea what he was setting

about, he acted now under a kind of automatic impulse. It was one of those rare moments in which unspoken thoughts are conveyed as lucidly as spoken ones. He knew, without any other reason than his own sure sense of it, that the Scotchman had rung off in alarm, and that Iris Lees was in greater danger, from some cause or another, than she herself suspected.

And yet who was she? Who was this Iris Lees? For all Gilmour knew to the contrary, she might be a dipsomaniac of forty. He was acting from conviction and conviction only, unsupported by any real or tangible evidence, and the conviction was that she was young, ignorant, and in some peculiar danger. Thus, he was now finding his hat in the hall and pulling on his gloves to go to Childrey Street, without pausing to give any cold reflection to the matter.

It was as he passed his desk to quit the room that he stopped for a moment and took up a copy of Debrett. He had never heard of a Lord Inkerman. Was he rich or poor, and what sort of a man was this agent likely to be? He turned over the pages, bending over the desk.

INKERMAN, BARON. (Bridges.)

Gilmour, still buttoning on a glove, read quickly down the particulars of the family.

FREDERICK AUGUSTUS, 4th Baron; *b.* 1856; *a.* 1878; *ed.* at Eton; formerly Lieut. Scots Greys; *m.* 1881, Letitia, who *d.* 1884, dau. of Sir Adam Bray, 7th Bart. [*Residence*: Inkerman House, Brentford; *Clubs*: Carlton, White's, Turf.]

Son living.

Hon. FRANCIS FREDERICK, b. April 6th, 1882;
ed. at Eton; is Capt. 9th King's Cavalry;
Clubs: Carlton, Turf.

"The Hon. Francis Frederick." Gilmour turned back to the letter and read the name there: "Francis," and then, "the man Francis's mother."

But the mother of the Hon. Francis Frederick, the future Baron Inkerman, was dead; had died in 1884; and there was not even a second marriage of Lord Inkerman recorded. It seemed clear that it must be some other Francis involved, and yet the coincidence was certainly remarkable.

He went through to the hall, but paused again for a moment. If he had really decided that Iris Lees needed help, were not the police the proper people to go to? But the spirit of adventure had descended suddenly upon him, the spirit of adventure and this automatic, unanalysed impulse to act. He had taken up the business and he would go through with it.

It was a quarter to six when he left the flat, and two things he had attended to. One was to supply himself with money, the other was to take with him a large iron key, such as one finds in old country doors. A label on the key bore the name, "Mr. Jones, Heath Cottage."

He took a taxi-cab at the end of St. George's Square and left it at the top of Childrey Street, telling the man to wait there for him. He then walked towards the house he had passed in the early hours.

The letter had mentioned a mews, and a few doors before he came to No. 42 he saw an archway leading through to a yard, wherein he could already see the usual signs of a job-master's business in operation.

There was a brass plate against the archway which stated that Mr. Fremlin, job-master, let out all manner of horses and vehicles for all purposes. Gilmour went down the yard.

It was apparently Mr. Fremlin who walked after him and inquired his business.

"I just wanted to know your terms for a saddle horse," he asked, and while the question was being answered he noted the long lines of windows that confronted him across a tall brick wall.

"It would be two guineas if you took it by the week," the job-master was saying. Gilmour saw that the room with the red blind was on the topmost floor of the house that he was concerned with.

"Thanks," he said. "I'll call again if I can think about it," and he went back into the street, leaving Mr. Fremlin feeling some annoyance.

CHAPTER II

The Same Day: Iris Gets Up

GILMOUR went straight to No. 42, mounted the steps of it quickly, and knocked and rang. The front doors of these Pimlico houses are deep-set, and standing close to the woodwork he could be seen from no window in the house.

There was a short wait and then he heard a single bolt drawn, and the door was opened.

He found himself confronted by the same girl who had given him the letter.

She started back, obviously very startled.

"What do you want, sir?" she asked him, in a terrified whisper.

"Ask your mistress to speak to me."

The girl hesitated, and Gilmour, stepping into the hall, closed the door after him.

"You ain't going to say anything about that letter?" the girl asked him in an underbreath.

"Not about you, anyway. Call your mistress."

The girl, after another frightened stare at him, went off up the flight of stairs at the end of the hall, and Gilmour waited. Several minutes passed and then he heard the rustle of clothes above on the landing. He took a step along the hall, and the next moment a gaunt, elderly woman came down the staircase towards

him, wrapped in a shabby dressing-gown that had once been bright in colour.

"About what do you wish to see me?" she asked of Gilmour.

He saw that it was the same face that had appeared at the window in the twilight, but he was very sure that he himself could hardly be recognised.

"I have come," said Gilmour quietly, "to take away from here Iris Lees, who is being kept in this house against her will."

The woman drew back, and for an instant was silent. Then she raised her voice.

"How dare you!" she exclaimed. "There is no woman here. Leave the house instantly."

She passed Gilmour and went to the hall door, opening it.

Gilmour remained standing in the passage. "I would be rather glad," he said coolly, "if you would alarm the neighbourhood, or call the police. I am going to find Miss Lees."

As he spoke he started, three steps at a time, up the staircase, and heard the front door close.

The woman had run to the stairs herself, and now she called after him.

"I've done no wrong, sir," she called out. "And the lady's ill. If you'll wait a moment——"

"I will not wait," Gilmour shouted back, and continued to stride up the stairs. He could hear the woman coming almost as quickly at his heels.

On the third floor he made a mistake and entered an empty room where the morning sun shone through white curtains, and as he emerged the woman reached the landing and seized his arm.

"Who are you?" she asked him.

"A friend of Miss Lees," Gilmour answered, shaking her off, "and she will leave this house with me if she wishes to."

He raced on up the next flight of stairs, and the woman followed closely upon him. As he reached the farther door on the topmost landing she gripped his arm again.

"I tell you you are doing an outrageous thing," she exclaimed. "The girl is ill and in my charge."

As she spoke she made a sudden movement to snatch a small key from a lock high up in the panelling of the door.

Gilmour held back her hand, and for a moment they struggled on the landing. The weight of both of them was against the woodwork when he succeeded in turning the key, and the movement threw open the door and precipitated both of them into the room.

A flood of red light, heightened by the sunlight that was streaming through the blind, momentarily dazzled his eyes, and as he swung into the room it was only for an instant that he caught a kaleidoscopic vision of a rose-tinted, white-gowned figure, a cream and pink face, and a halo of gleaming plaited hair rising out of white bedding; while a sheet falling back revealed the tint of the flesh of a small moving hand. This with one little half-smothered cry. Then with almost the same movement by which he had entered the room, he pulled the other back on to the landing with him, closing the door.

He was panting now, more from excitement than exertion. This glimpse of Iris Lees had fired him to incandescence.

"Miss Lees!" he called out.

"Yes," cried a girl's voice, abrupt and startled, as if she had only now awakened out of sleep.

"I have come to take you away from this place if you wish to leave here. Your letter fell into my hands, and I am here to take you. Do you wish to come out of this house?"

Into his voice he had thrown all the weight and meaning and imploration that he could summon.

There was a moment of utter stillness, and then came back the answer:

"Yes, yes. Please take me away from here."

Gilmour turned to the woman, who had been momentarily silenced.

"Now, are you satisfied?" he asked her.

"Who are you?" she answered. "That's what you haven't satisfied me about."

"A friend in need—you'd better call it that," answered Gilmour grimly.

"Coming into a respectable house like this!" said the woman. "And the girl ill and in my charge."

"Call the police if you wish to."

"One doesn't want anything to do with the police; not in a respectable house. It's the biggest outrage I ever heard of, and you take her against my will. I can't say more than that."

Gilmour turned towards the door.

"How many minutes will it take you to get ready?" he called out.

The voice came back, hesitating and tremulous.

"I'm afraid my things are not here."

The woman laughed.

"Take the girl if you like," she cried, "but you'll get no clothes out of me."

At the foot of the stairs the little frightened face of

the servant girl was visible. Gilmour called out to her:

"Bring this lady here something of yours to wear. Fetch it at once, and I'll pay you well for it."

"All right, sir!"

Already she had gone, and Gilmour could hear her running down the stairs.

The woman sat down on a chair on the landing, and began to talk with hysterical incoherence. It was the biggest and most dastardly outrage she had ever heard of. She was a respectable woman, placed in charge of a young invalid lady by her best friends, and she was to be bullied and insulted like this. With the world like it was she couldn't make a scandal of it, but never in her life had she heard of such a thing, nor would she have believed it possible. Not in broad daylight, she wouldn't.

Then Gilmour saw the servant girl returning and stood between the woman and where she must pass. She carried a bundle and had on her own hat and a coat.

"Louisa!" exclaimed her mistress. "You dare!"

"I'm not going to stop here," said the girl. "I've had enough."

Gilmour stood back as she went into the room, and the door closed upon her.

Perhaps five minutes passed, with the woman on the chair still rambling out her assertion that for audacity and sheer dastardliness this outrage beat anything that had come to her knowledge at any period of her long life.

Then the door opened again and Gilmour saw a tall girl standing against the background of scarlet light. He saw, breathlessly, almost, a face, fair and oval, with

bright hair looped up about it and brighter eyes that turned towards him a look that was intoxicating in its tremulous confidence.

"A nice thing!" exclaimed the woman, getting up. "And don't you think this is the end of it, neither! You've not heard the last of this, mind you!"

The servant girl had appeared behind the other, and Gilmour spoke quickly.

"Go to the front door," he told them.

They hurried down the stairs, and a minute later all three were in the street and making towards the waiting taxi-cab. The woman had not attempted to follow them, even down the stairs.

There were a few people about now; women at work about their front doorsteps, milkmen and paper-boys; but neither Gilmour nor his companions attracted much attention. The whole thing had happened quietly, so far as the outside world was concerned.

At the end of the street they could see the taxi-cab waiting, with the driver standing out on the kerbstone and watching with some anxiety for the coming of his fare. Gilmour turned to the little servant.

"Have you a home anywhere?" he asked her.

"Yes, sir. In Chelmsford. I want to go there."

"Can you find your own way to the station?"

"Yes," she answered. "I'd rather. I don't want to wait about here. I'm going to get a Monster bus to Liverpool Street."

She was obviously well able to take care of herself, and Gilmour found five sovereigns and gave them to her. The sight of the money seemed to frighten her more than her adventure, and without answering either Iris Lees or Gilmour in their attempted expression of thanks, she hurried away down the

street, holding her money in her hand and looking very pale and scared.

Gilmour turned to his companion.

"Are you going to trust me?" he asked her.

"Oh yes, of course," she answered. "But let us go from here quickly."

So far he had had hardly time for more than his first eager glance at her, but he had already absorbed, as it were, a sense of her personality. And he had found it a revelation.

She was of somewhat more than average height, so that in the decidedly short skirt which had been given her, and the even shorter mackintosh, with her hair still in its plaits and hanging like a schoolgirl's from under a white flannel tam-o'-shanter, she looked alarmingly young. But there was something in her expression of the gravity and composure which is an attribute of womanhood or of experience; and it reassured Gilmour as to her age. He certainly hoped that he was not dealing with a sheer schoolgirl, and it was with relief that he put her age down as at least nineteen or twenty.

Her clothes in detail he had hardly noticed, not particularly wishing to, but her appearance was at least respectable enough not to excite surprised attention.

The driver had taken his seat as they approached, and Gilmour telling him to drive to Paddington they took their places.

Iris Lees had so far controlled any excitement that she was feeling, except for a slight opening of her lips and a quick breathing. Gilmour, watching her anxiously, was not at all sure that she was not simply feeling amusement. But now as the cab passed the

house which she had just quitted he felt a hand involuntarily clutching his coat sleeve.

"I'm all right," she whispered, "but I want to be out of this awful street."

He waited until they were running through the noisy traffic outside Victoria Station before he spoke.

"You understand," he asked her, "that your letter fell into my hands this morning? Circumstances obliged me to open it, and the point is now, what had we better do. I'd better tell you that I telephoned to your father at Brentford this morning, but not with very promising results."

He told her of the conversation, and the hovering smile disappeared from her face.

She looked at him quickly.

"I think," she said, "that you had better take me somewhere—anywhere, just for the moment. Then I'll tell you everything."

"All right," said Gilmour. "And don't talk now. We'll get alone presently."

A block in the traffic had happened on the corner, and for some moments they sat back in silence. Then the cab began to move slowly forward, and the next instant he felt his companion shrinking back in her seat, while a hand went out and again involuntarily touched his sleeve.

"What is it?" he asked her.

She did not answer, but he saw that she was looking out into the traffic with fixed, staring eyes, and he turned to look himself in the same direction. The hood of their vehicle had been put back, and quite near to them, on the outer edge of the east-bound vehicles, he saw a great, grey motor car, and two men in it, one young and one stout and elderly, who had

half risen in their seats to stare back into the girl's blanched face.

"What is it?" Gilmour asked her again.

"Oh, do tell the man to go faster, please," was her only answer.

Gilmour shot one more glance back into the grey car. He saw the younger of the two men leaning forward over his seat, and heard him shout a sudden order to the chauffeur:

"Turn your car round!"

For one more moment Gilmour stared back, and saw the man at the wheel seize a sudden opportunity and turn the car into the west-bound traffic. Then he leaned forward and spoke quickly to the cabman.

"Just let your machine rip as soon as you can, and dodge through into some back streets. There's a car following us."

The driver obeyed cheerfully. He had steered out into the open road and the engines began to hum softly and fast as they shot away. Again Gilmour looked behind him, and saw how the grey car was getting into trouble, half turned in the crowded traffic. Their cab had turned off now into the labyrinth of quiet streets lying behind Grosvenor Place, and in a few minutes they knew that they had made themselves safe from pursuit.

"It's all right now," he said to Iris. "But who was it?"

"My father," she muttered. "My father and Francis."

"What Francis?"

"Francis Bridges. Lord Inkerman's son. I will tell you everything when we are only alone."

They did not speak again until they had drawn up at

Paddington Station, and had walked out on to the platform, the time then being five-and-twenty minutes to seven.

"We're going to change cabs here," Gilmour told her "It's King's Cross that I'm making for really, but I thought it best to change once. You are quite sure that you would rather trust me to put you somewhere than to take you to Brentford?"

"Quite," Iris answered decisively.

As it happened, the platform was thronged with the participators in an early excursion, and they passed out into Praed Street unnoticed. There they hailed a second cab, and reaching King's Cross, Gilmour bought two tickets for Ayot St. Peter, which is a little station on the branch line from Hatfield to Leighton Buzzard. He was revealing for the first time his one idiosyncratic secret.

CHAPTER III

The Same Day. "Mr. Jones"—Iris explains Herself, and Gilmour looks "cross "

GILMOUR seemed the last man in the world likely to lead a "double life," but the fact remained that, at one place which he occasionally disappeared to, he was another man under another name. This was his idiosyncrasy and his secret.

Twelve months before he had found "To Let" a small thatched cottage on the edge of a remote Hertfordshire heath. It appealed to him so extravagantly that he had paid a year's rent down within an hour of his first glimpse of it. It was a form of jealous possession quite common where an ideal country cottage at next to no rent is concerned; a feeling of hugging the treasure to one, and defending it with lead and knife as a robber might his hoard. Thus he took the cottage on the spur of a frantic moment in the name of "Mr. Jones," lived there as "Mr. Jones," and no friend of his was ever the wiser.

He had stumbled on to the place when a walking tour had discovered him roughly clad and even unshaven, and it was in similar guise that he paid his periodical visits there. He had made no friends of his neighbours, preferring complete isolation, and to avoid even shopping he stored the place with many tins of such fare as biscuits and dried milk. The very postman had scarcely

seen him, and, in fact, the only man with whom he had exchanged a word was his landlord, and he lived a full mile away. It was to this "Jones" cottage that he was now venturing to take Iris Lees.

He had told her this very briefly in the cab, but, some calm reason having already come to him, he asked if she was sure she would not rather that they hunted up her parents. But on this point she was adamant. If her father had acted as he did over the telephone there was something that she was afraid of and which she would explain presently. And seeing her father and Francis Bridges together had, she added, confirmed this something. She begged him to take her to the cottage for the moment anyway. She had to accept his help because she hadn't the least idea what else she could do, but of course she would not continue to be a trouble to him.

Gilmour was anything but comfortable. Iris's manner was very graceful, and in fact bewilderingly enchanting in its suggestion of innocent confidence, but nevertheless when he got into the train with her, to carry her off to his cottage, and looked at her intoxicating beauty, he could not help feeling that here were the sort of conditions under which men act madly. He had, in short, found himself the victim of that sub-self that in matters of the heart asserts itself in spite of all the dictates of reason.

They had had to wait three-quarters of an hour for this, the first morning train to Ayot, and they had passed the time away enjoying a breakfast which Iris at least, made substantial. And now, as they steamed away out of the station, they found themselves seated opposite to one another in an empty carriage, and Gilmour decidedly embarrassed.

Iris had turned from her companion to look out of the window, as if waiting impatiently for the train to have settled down into its run, and Gilmour sat somewhat furtively looking at her, wondering what were these little differences in mouth and eyes and nose that can make some women seem so much prettier than others. Her skin was fair and soft and exquisitely coloured; the eyes had in their large, half-grey and half-blue orbs a clear sparkle that did not detract from their softness; her lips were full and red; and her hair seemed composed of every shade of gold and brown; yet it was something more than all this that made her fascinating. Was it the slight bluntness of the nose, or the little hollows at the corners of the lips, or the actual expression, that was solemn in the eyes and smiling in the mouth, or was it—?

He broke off abruptly as she turned with a sudden eager movement towards him.

"Now I'll try," she said, "to tell you everything. I only hope you're not going to be cross with me when I've finished."

Gilmour was quick to snatch at the proffered attitude of a somewhat strict guardianship; it helped him to feel very justified in his action, and it was also rather pleasant.

"I hope not," he said, with an attempt at sternness. "I am sure you had some quite good reason for wishing to leave that house. I'm puzzled at present as to how you came to be there."

"I went there," she replied, "with the idea of being married."

"Oh," said Gilmour, so lamely that he said it again. "Oh!"

"I ran away yesterday afternoon from a boarding-school at Eastbourne."

"Oh," he said again. And in that instant he felt the sudden leaping up within him of all the fiends of jealousy. And, anyway, what on earth had he let himself in for? Was he then meddling, and thanklessly and dangerously meddling, in the affairs of a runaway schoolgirl? And a schoolgirl who had carried amative experiment to the point of elopement. Stubbornly, from that calligraphy of hers, had he pictured her as helpless innocence, but now he asked himself why, when she came out of that room in Childrey Street, he had not had sense enough to guess her probable age and convey her straight off to the nearest police station. He had a disagreeable notion that the law had a long arm in dealing with young persons like Iris and their doings, and he felt the tremors of alarm mingling with the wave of other emotions that had swept over him.

"You're cross already," said Iris.

Gilmour protested that he was not, and said to himself that at Hatfield he would surrender himself and Iris to the first policeman he could meet with.

"But I should be glad to know how old, or rather how young, you might happen to be," he added. "To tell the truth, I'd put you down at twenty. I'm afraid you're——"

"Eighteen?" said Iris. "Well, I'm not quite; though I'm over seventeen. But do let me tell you everything."

Gilmour was a little relieved. He had prepared himself for worse.

A new expression had come into her face. It was entirely solemn now, and if anything, the result was

more fascinating than before. And the confidence had increased, too, with a tender solicitation added to it. Gilmour found his sub-self talking at sheer random.

"I'm not cross, really, but I hardly know what we're letting ourselves in for. If you'll be a good girl and tell me everything, we'll see what we can make of it."

"I'll begin at the beginning," said Iris, "and it's all so logical that you'll understand at once. To begin with, my name is not Lees. I don't know what it is, but it's not Lees, and it's probably not even Iris. Mr. Henry Lees is my father by adoption, and I am the daughter of quite poor people."

Gilmour had to drop something of the almost distant manner which he was struggling hard to maintain, for fear of appearing to resent this confession.

"My father was a boatman on one of the Scottish lakes, and fourteen years ago Mr. and Mrs. Lees saw me and adopted me after there had been a boating accident, in which my father was injured in some way. But that's nothing to do with this. Mrs. Lees died, and ever since I was twelve I have been away at boarding-school, hardly ever coming home for my holidays.

"But just over a year ago, when I was sixteen, Mr. Lees sent for me to return to Brentford and keep house for him, and I did so. I had seen very little of him even in my holidays, and I found the change from a school life to living with him at Brentford simply awful, so that when Francis Bridges was invalided home from Ireland, and made himself nice to me——"

"One moment," said Gilmour. "I want to clear up

the mystery of these Francis. Who is Francis's mother?"

"I'm coming to that," said Iris, and went on:

"Francis Bridges, as I told you, is Lord Inkerman's son—his only son—and when he came to Inkerman House he was in that weak, convalescent state, when any man may appear an angel. The Grange stands in the grounds of Inkerman House, and, though so near London, there is about sixty acres of land there, so prettily wooded and cleverly arranged that you can imagine yourself to be right in the heart of the country. Well, Francis met me one morning when I was out walking and he was alone, and we started a conversation. He was very weak, leaning on two sticks, and he asked me to give him an arm, which, of course, I had to do; and after that I happened to meet him often in this same little wood behind the lake.

"I can't say I really liked him, but I liked having to help him. I couldn't have liked him at all really, because as he got stronger and I didn't have to do little things for him I was quite disappointed, and however much one likes mothering a man, one would naturally prefer to see him getting well and strong, wouldn't they?"

"I suppose so," said Gilmour.

"Now, nobody knew anything about our meeting at all. The wood went right round the walls of the grounds, and I could slip into it from the bottom of the Grange garden, while he could walk through the trees right round from the other side, but one day Lord Inkerman came across us when we were walking together. Now, we weren't doing anything at all, we were simply walking, but there was a most fearful row. Francis saw his father first and told me to run for it,

which I was silly enough to do, though it was almost certain that I had been seen. The result was a most awful grill, and I was sent off to boarding-school again, after Lord Inkerman had actually boxed my ears in front of Mr. Lees. And father himself was furious. He said I had jeopardised his position, and that he would never have me in the house again. I wanted simply to go away and try to earn my own living, but he insisted upon my going back to school, and as it was just at the commencement of the autumn term away I was sent at once, to Eastbourne.

"I was not really disappointed. It was a new school, and I was one of the older girls, and altogether I rather liked being back among the sort of companions I was used to. Still, the going home had unsteadied me, and I could not settle down to school work again. I became interested in other things, and spent most of my time studying subjects that were quite outside the school curriculum."

Gilmour asked her what sort of subjects.

"Oh, all the modern ideas about women," she answered lightly. "All the things that I thought ought to interest one; the modern frank conception of love, and so forth. I absorbed it all and started quite a cult. It was a dull school, and it was rather amusing to be the one advanced person."

Gilmour, decidedly inclined himself to keep the clock back for women, stared at his companion with increasingly alarmed interest; though he could trace in her face nothing but enthusiasm and animation.

Iris, without removing her clear eyes from his own, was going on quite brightly:

"As for Francis, I had probably not once thought of him for months. I had got quite a new idea of

men in my head and I should probably not have given him another moment's reflection if I had not quite accidentally found out that my correspondence was being assiduously watched, and, in fact, that the Eastbourne school was simply being regarded by Mr. Lees and Lord Inkerman as a place of banishment, to prevent me setting myself to ensnare Francis Bridges. This was why I had not been allowed to go out into the world. I was naturally very angry indeed, because there never had been anything in our friendship. But I knew Mr. Lees. He had been all his life in the Inkerman service, and his father before him, and he was as shocked at the mere thought of my speaking to Francis as Lord Inkerman himself was. But the only effect which this discovery had upon me was to make me determined to live up to my reputation. Nothing was easier than to write to Francis himself, for I found the names of his clubs in a Peerage that always stood on a table in the school drawing-room, and I promptly sent him a letter, asking him to write to me. I told him that he could always address letters to me at a certain tea-shop where illicit school correspondence was often carried on.

"This was simply the result of my being mistrusted, and it ought to be a warning to all parents. If I had been asked to give a promise I should have given one, but instead I had been merely told by Mr. Lees that it would be better for me to go back to school again. And perhaps the views I had been absorbing also had something to do with it. I rather liked the idea of frankly writing to a man and asking him to correspond with me.

"Well, the letter was posted, and in a few days

there was one back from Francis. That was the beginning. We wrote regularly, and yesterday it ended at the point where, having quite convinced myself that we both loved one another and that therefore I was justified in going to him, I ran away."

Gilmour was simply staring at her, and all the time she kept her frank eyes fixed unflinchingly upon his own.

"And if there's one thing I have learnt," she went on, "it is to mistrust correspondence absolutely. Anybody can make themselves seem anything they like as soon as they have got a pen in their hand. I had quite convinced myself from Francis's letters that he was my soul-mate, and when he suggested the marriage—"

"Oh," said Gilmour, "you did really and honestly contemplate marriage, then; even with a 'soul-mate?'"

"Of course," said Iris, "and I thought I was being very practical when I wrote back and said: 'What about my father's consent?' But Francis assured me that there was a way out of all that; he had found a clergyman willing to marry us without asking questions, and it would be all right. I was to come on Monday, and he would send his car to Eastbourne, because he was at Aldershot and could not get leave early enough in the morning. He would join me in London at two-thirty.

"With all my reading, I am afraid I was much simpler than I thought, for I took it absolutely for granted that the motor would take me straight to the church, and you will believe this when I tell you that yesterday morning I left the school wearing a

little wreath of orange blossoms secretly under my hat.

"There was nothing simpler than the elopement itself. I simply slipped out of the building immediately after our twelve-o'clock dinner, and found the car waiting for me at the appointed place just outside the town. But here I have something to explain to you. The name of Francis's chauffeur—the man who drove me to London—is Francis too."

"Oh," exclaimed Gilmour. "That accounts then—"

"A most horrible young man," said Iris, with a shudder of repulsion. "I had often seen him at Brentford; a little tatooed object who had been an army servant. Francis is his surname, of course, not his Christian name, and I had heard that he was chosen in the first place out of a sort of bravado. Francis in fact always enjoys any muddle that occurs because of it. Well, we got to London, and what happened was this: the car did not go to a church at all, but went to that house you took me from, and I was immediately very angry.

"Francis was there, and I did not like his manner. He said it was merely a matter of form, and that as I had to be in residence in the district for so many days before we could be married he thought the house where his chauffeur's mother lived would be a quiet and proper one to wait in. I was angrier than I had ever felt before, and when I asked him why he had not told me this, and how he dared expect me to stay in such a place, and without being consulted about it at all, he enraged me by laughing.

"And he had so altered to what he had been, or seemed to be, only a year before. He was no longer courteous or gentle; he pulled me to him and kissed

me and it made me feel very sick and ill, and presently he told me that if I would not respect him he would not respect me.

"I tried then to leave the house, and he stopped me.

"We had already said things to one another that made even the merest acquaintanceship impossible, yet now he pulled me back from the door and swore I should not go out of the house, still vowing that it was only a matter of waiting the legal time.

"What could I do? I am not strong. I tried to get away and I found that he could easily hold me. Then I did the only thing I possibly could do. I pretended to be taken really and violently ill."

"Pamela used to do the same thing," said Gilmour. "It is an old and well-proved policy, I believe."

"It was instinct with me," said Iris, whose face had become hot and now remained so. "I'd never dreamed of being placed in such a situation, especially after what I had been reading. Anyway, it succeeded. Francis became abjectly repentant, and since I had assumed a state of complete collapse, I could not very well prevent the other Francis's mother from putting me to bed. She assured me that I should be perfectly safe, and that Mr. Lees should be sent for. It was when I recovered sufficiently to dictate a telegram to him that my suspicions became aroused; Mrs. Francis told me that Lord Inkerman's son had already gone to Brentford himself to see my father."

"And what were you afraid of?" asked Gilmour.

"I was afraid then that he would tell Mr. Lees everything, and that I should be compelled to marry him. I suppose that Francis did only want me to wait for the legal residence business to be put right, but don't you see, his treatment of me has made me loathe

him, and I would rather die a hundred deaths than marry him now."

Gilmour was still staring at her.

"But, my dear child," he said, "you don't seriously suppose that your danger is that Mr. Lees will oblige the Honourable Francis to marry you?"

Iris stared back at him with bewildering innocence.

"But why else should Mr. Lees have been so annoyed at your telephoning—why else should he and Francis have been coming to me this morning? I refused to have Francis yesterday; he is determined to get me, and he has got Mr. Lees on his side. What else could it be?"

"It might be any one of a very large variety of things," answered Gilmour, "and the last of them is your adopted parent acting the outraged father towards the Honourable Francis. Isn't it much more likely that the young man has explained his conduct in some sort of way and that Mr. Lees simply means to be very angry and then ship you off to school again?"

"If it was that," said Iris, "I might go home, even if I allowed Francis to trump up some innocent explanation of my running away to him, but I don't think you're right. I think that if I do go back they'll force the marriage on me."

Gilmour was quite certain that whatever machinations were in progress, Iris's innocent theory was far enough from being correct, but he was so much relieved by her being capable of imagining it, after her alarming demonstrations of mental outlook, that he did not press the point; he only asked her why she had written the letter which had fallen into his hands, and why the servant girl had taken it to the area stairs at three o'clock in the morning.

"Because," said Iris, "as I told you, I wrote out a telegram to Mr. Lees which was supposed to have been sent to him, but which the servant told me had been torn up. She also told me that a telegram had come to the house for Francis Bridges, and, putting two and two together, I supposed that Mr. Lees had traced me there and sent for him. It was quite possible for him to trace me. When I was missed at Eastbourne, for instance, somebody might have seen me go and noticed the number of the car, and Mr. Lees would have known at once whose it was. Father would have been quite wise enough to have wired to that house. Then Francis Bridges, seeing that it would all have to come out, would naturally have gone to the Grange and seen my father, with the result that they would arrange between them that I must be married whether I liked it or not."

"But what about Lord Inkerman?" asked Gilmour.

"Oh, he'd try to stop it," said Iris, "but as Francis Bridges will be the next Lord Inkerman I am afraid that Mr. Lees would do what he told him."

Gilmour had already concluded to himself that Iris, having behaved very foolishly, and yet got out of her troubles intact, Mr. Lees was mainly interested in hushing the matter up and getting his adopted daughter out of sight again, and he decided that he would not alter his first decision. He would take Iris to his cottage, leave her there, and go back and see Mr. Lees for himself.

They were already running into Hatfield, and he told Iris what he was going to do.

"I don't care about anything," she answered, "as long as I never have to see Francis Bridges again as long as I live."

It was only a short journey after Hatfield, and it was not nine o'clock when they left Ayot station and started to walk to Heath Cottage across the fields.

CHAPTER IV

The Same Day. The Mastodon on the Microphone.
Stop-Press News.

UP to this hour Gilmour had held and dogmatically expressed a violent pessimism as regards almost all women. The whole fabric of such philosophy now fell utterly to pieces in crossing a few miles of fields. He knew that what was called "falling in love" had mysteriously and even pleasurably happened to him, and this in spite of the fact that a distinct half of himself was up in violent arms against the whole thing. It was in this distracted fashion that he now enjoyed the rare sensation of one who experiences a perfectly natural emotion several years after it is due to happen.

He was altogether puzzled and bewildered. There could be no doubt that Iris was, according to all his own views on the subject, a very alarming young person, and equally small doubt that he, Gilmour, was running very decided risks in having so much to do with her; yet it only needed one glance at her burning, animated face to send a thrill through him that made any reasoning about her, or about his own position in the matter, impossible. It was a thrill that seemed to tell him that nothing on earth mattered compared with the feeling it. And Iris seemed a little uncomfortable, which gave her a bewitching sort of shyness. She commenced to talk about commonplace subjects in a nervous, halting

manner that made him sorry for her, which was another pleasurable sensation, and long before the heather-covered heath beside his cottage came into view he was in complete subjection to that part of himself that was hurling him metaphorically at Iris's feet.

After they had left the station road they had not passed one soul, and they reached the cottage apparently quite unobserved. The last hundred yards of the walk, with the old ivy-covered walls of the place he was taking her to in view, had become suddenly embarrassing, and he breathed a deep breath of relief when they had passed through the wicket gate in the tall box hedge and had reached the porch. The thrill which had never left him became a sheer physical discomfort when he had unlocked the door and she had passed in front of him into the little sunlit hall. When he closed the door and took her through into his living-room—the first visitor that he had ever received there—he found himself perceptibly trembling.

Iris's manner, however, now that she was in the room, had a somewhat steadying effect. She abandoned the shyness and exchanged it for an almost cold reserve, as she looked about her.

Gilmour had furnished the place quaintly, with a selection of old cottage furniture, so that it looked very like the inside of a peasant's house. The sun streamed in against whitewashed walls and made orange-coloured diamond squares on a floor of whitened stones, with here and there pieces of cocoanut matting.

He thought at first that his guest was very adversely criticising this humble abode of his, but after a full minute of solemn examination she smiled suddenly, and he almost closed his eyes as he looked at her. It was the first time that he had seen Iris really smile

and the effect of it nearly overpowered him. Still a little more colour had come with it, and the soft, full mouth made of itself a kind of ripple that seemed to swell up over the cheeks and form a billow about her eyes, almost hiding them. When the half-hidden eyes turned to his and her nose reeved up a little, and she merely said, "Isn't it *sweet*!" he went out into the passage and panted.

"I've got to rein myself in here," he muttered desperately, and when he returned to the room he was barely civil in his formality.

He took her through into the kitchen and revealed his unappetising store of tinned food. He showed her where she could pump water in a little outhouse, and murmured that she would find a comfortable room upstairs. Then he seized upon his hat again, explained to her in the briefest possible manner that he would see her father, and smooth things out if he could; that he would not return that night unless he had made an entirely satisfactory arrangement and came to fetch her, and that she was on no account to show herself outside the premises. Finally he fled the house, and did not check a walk that was almost a run until he had crossed the heath and was in the lanes beyond. Then his gait changed to the drag of exhaustion.

It was still hardly ten o'clock, and he walked on slowly to catch the 10.55 from Ayot station, trying to calm down the novel mixture of emotions that had come upon him.

But it was when he had reached King's Cross station that he received, violently and suddenly, a shock that effectively roused him. It was an evening paper bill against the bookstall, and he read:

"AMAZING ABDUCTION

IN

PIMLICO"

He was still staring, transfixed, at the huge type, when a voice smote like thunder on his ears. It was only the voice of a small paper-boy, but it sounded like the treading of a mastodon on a microphone.

"Pimlico Artrage!" piped the little boy, standing with folded arms near his wares. "Young lidy snatched art of a harse in broad daylight!"

Gilmour was in imminent danger of betraying the degree of his interest in the news, but the child had scarcely bestowed a look upon him, and now resumed the whistling of an air which had been interrupted. With the paper purchased and thrust into his overcoat pocket, Gilmour walked like a somnambulist down the platform.

He had previously intended to inquire the best route to Brentford, and he mechanically made these inquiries, being advised to go by the "District." With the paper still unread in his pocket, he made his way down to the Underground, feeling a heat like incandescence about his ears.

He would wait until he was in the train before he would dare open those appalling sheets, and now down on the "District" bookstall he read another placard:

"PIMLICO ABDUCTION.

ARREST EXPECTED."

He bought this paper, too, and waited dazedly for his train to come in. Then he found an empty seat at the end of a long smoking-carriage, and there unfolded

his horrific purchases. It was the last of the two papers which he commenced his feast upon, and he stared dully at the huge headlines that were spread across the width of three columns. Then, after a swift glance about him, he commenced to read :

ASTOUNDING DAYLIGHT ABDUCTION.

UNWILLING GIRL

FORCED OUT OF A PIMLICO HOUSE.

In the early hours of this morning a quiet Pimlico by-street was the scene of an amazing outrage, wrapped in considerable mystery, a young lady, whose age is given as seventeen, being forcibly removed from a sick-bed by an apparently total stranger and conveyed away in a taxi-cab. The scene of this extraordinary outrage was No. 42 Childrey Street, in the occupation of a Mrs. Francis, whose evidence, it is hoped, will lead to an early arrest.

ON THE EVE OF MARRIAGE.

The young lady is a Miss Iris Lees, of the family of Mr. Henry Lees, stated to be steward to Lord Inker-man, and it is understood that the young lady, who was staying in the house of her *fiancé's* mother, was to have been married shortly. Her lover is a young chauffeur, also of Lord Inkerman's household, a Mr. George Francis. The matter is a little complicated by the fact that Miss Lees had actually eloped herself from an Eastbourne school, but parental forgiveness had afterwards been obtained. Miss Lees was ill in bed at the time, being a somewhat hysterical young lady who had been upset by the trouble with

her father, though this had been quite amicably settled.

EVIDENCE OF LOVER'S MOTHER.

Mrs. Francis, the young chauffeur's mother, though much upset by the extraordinary affair, has been able to place in the hands of the police evidence that should lead to an early arrest. It appears that a little before six o'clock a tall, sinister-looking man, with a dark moustache, and about thirty-five years of age, called at the house, and being admitted raced at once up the stairs, and, trying various rooms, arrived eventually at Miss Lees' bedroom, calling to her to immediately dress herself and come with him.

TERRIFIED GIRL.

The terrified girl at first refused, but upon the man threatening to enter the room and drag her from her bed she appears to have unwillingly dressed, and to have left the house with him, apparently Mrs. Francis being too upset and frightened to attempt to interfere. She cannot even describe the girl's clothing, as the poor woman was in a fainting condition when the two left the house. A little servant girl was so frightened that she started to run away to her home at Chelmsford, but returned, and her evidence should be of the utmost importance, as it appears that she saw the pair in the street, and that the man gave her money to keep silent. Also a Mr. Fremlin, job-master, whose premises are immediately behind No 42, says a man called at his yard, and while making an innocent inquiry was noticed to be suspiciously watching the back windows of the house in

Childrey Street. Mr. Fremlin declares that he believed he recognised the man as a Pimlico resident. This happened immediately before the outrage.

FATHER PASSES ABDUCTED GIRL.

It also strangely happened that the very cab conveying the man and the abducted girl was seen by the father outside Victoria Station. He was motoring from Brentford to see his daughter, and was amazed to recognise her seated with a man in a passing taxi-cab. He had his car turned, but by that time the cab had disappeared, and, thinking that he was possibly mistaken, he went on to Childrey Street, where he was apprised of what had happened, and at once called in the police.

TAXI-CAB DRIVER FOUND.

A taxi-cab driver is said to have called at Scotland Yard with important information and the police are confident that they know the man and will be able to effect an early arrest.

Gilmour's eyes lingered for some moments on the last line, and then across on another column he saw a smear of smudged type:

STOP-PRESS.

PIMLICO ABDUCTION. WARRANT OBTAINED.

We understand that a warrant has been obtained for the arrest of Robert William Gilmour, 17A St. George's Square, S.W., who is missing.

Gilmour crushed the paper and stared about him.

He was almost alone in the compartment, and certainly no one had noticed his utter bewilderment.

A warrant applied for! There it was in black and white in an evening paper!

A cold perspiration had come out over his whole face, and he stared about him.

The world looked completely altered. There was a frame of coloured photographs of Burnham Beeches opposite his seat, and a poster of a child wading through flowers in the absurd back garden of a garden-city two-hundred-pound cottage. All these ordinary things had lost any appearance of reality.

What on earth had happened?

Twenty-four hours before, no shadow of this could possibly have suggested itself, and now here was a warrant actually out for his arrest. He was being proclaimed throughout the country as a "wanted" man, his name was being bandied about on every tongue, as the name of a felon, and down there in the Hertfordshire cottage was a girl whom he had known for less than three hours, hidden away under his protection, and probably with half England starting a hue and cry after her.

He seemed to have altered himself; as he looked with a stealthy movement about him, at his fellow-passengers. They were all absorbed in their papers, absorbed probably in this tale of the Pimlico outrage, and he turned his own eyes back to the nightmare columns.

There is something about cold type that in spite of all experience carries weight. A journalist himself can be impressed by any *canard*, and Gilmour, staring again at the absurd, garbled, transparently

lying, account of what had happened, half felt himself guilty of all that he was accused of. But with the first shock over he felt about for some plausible reason why this masterpiece of invention should have been conceived. He read through the report once again to take stock of its wholesale discrepancies, and even as he read, the sense of truth again insidiously manifested itself, and crept over him.

He suddenly put away the paper and stared before him.

Suppose it was all true—and Iris an hysterical girl who had concocted the whole of the story she had told him? Suppose it was the chauffeur she had eloped with, and now wishing, perhaps merely in a fit of pique, to escape from her bargain, she had made this outrageous use of him by telling the tale that sounded most romantic and was most likely to win his sympathy?

The idea swept over him, bringing with it a sensation almost of sickness. But he cast it aside again. Mrs. Francis's story—why were there so many sheer lies in it? She knew what Iris was dressed in, and whose clothes they were. Then, too, there was the little servant, obviously bribed to forswear the truth. It was that incident of the servant girl that gave him the courage to face the thing out as a conspiracy of falsehoods, engineered for some purpose that he had yet to find the clue to.

But it was a clue that needed little seeking for. Here was the Honourable Francis Bridges, an officer in the King's service, recklessly encompassing the betrayal of a young woman whose parentage and position seemed to play her into his hands. Iris's own theory that Lees had quickly traced her to the chauffeur's house was

probably quite correct, and thus there had been a truce while Bridges explained himself to Henry Lees. And Lees would no doubt have then safeguarded the girl's actual honour, but there had come, like a bolt from the blue, that telephone summons in the early morning, when he had been nonplussed enough to ring off in silence. Probably Francis Bridges was sleeping that night at Inkerman House or Grange, and Lees had roused him and the two had dashed for Childrey Street in the grey car, to stop the ruin that was threatened if a stranger should learn their secret.

So far this was logical enough reasoning, and Gilmour went on with the attempt to reconstruct what had happened. The grey car had passed the taxi-cab and Iris had been recognized ; the pursuit of the cab had failed, and the two men had hurried on to the house in Pimlico to learn exactly what had happened ; Lees prepared at any cost to help shield his master's son from the catastrophic exposure that was now threatened. Meanwhile the servant girl had quite possibly returned of her free will—she had appeared bold and stupid enough to have done so—possibly to secure her “ box ” or her wages. Thus Lees and this very Honourable Francis, learning the worst, had rapidly concocted this likely-seeming countertale of the chauffeur lover, had bribed or bullied the servant into standing by them, and had taken themselves to the police, hoping to strike the first blow, and determined to strike it squarely and openly. It was the conduct of sheer panic, but it was plausible and probable.

And, for the moment at least, Gilmour could see that the tale was one that must weigh. Quite possibly Iris's letters would apply, by no great stretch of the imagination, equally well to the chauffeur, and she had certainly

left Eastbourne with him. Naturally she would have left no trace of Bridges' letter to her at the school, and every scrap of such evidence that she had taken away with her had been left behind in the Childrey Street house. In fact the whole of this insane friendship had been a secret thing, leaving no jot now of proof of any sort behind it.

All this time the train was carrying him swiftly on, and he had yet to face the question of what he himself was to do about it.

Down at the cottage was Iris Lees, safe enough for the moment. He was certain that no clue of any kind existed which could connect him, Gilmour, with "Mr. Jones" and Heath Cottage. And there was at least a fortnight's provisions in the house. Iris, then, was temporarily secure, if he did not choose to disclose her hiding-place; but his own arrest seemed inevitable and it was a prospect that he could not be expected to welcome. Clearly there was nothing to do but surrender himself, but the sight of those blatant pages and the thought of dragging Iris through the mire of them, weighed more with him than any care for himself. Then he saw for the first time that her implication in his arrest was not inevitable, for there was one middle course that he might take.

Suppose he surrendered himself and admitted to nothing more than having taken the girl from the house in response to the letter, saying that he had found it in the street. Was it not quite possible that the prosecution would find it impossible to involve him further? If he went on to Brentford now and gave himself up it would hardly look as if he much feared the consequences of his action, and if he could only feel sure that the girl was safe at the cottage it was a course that might

possibly succeed ; leaving him free to go to her afterwards, and then get her away somewhere where she could lead her own life.

It was a course that offered the advantage of keeping Iris free from the taint of personal contact with police and press, and which promised him a means of clearing his own name.

It would have to be done with the most extreme caution, leaving some loophole for unforeseen complications. He would go to Lees as he had intended, he would assume that Iris had already returned home, but he would give them some hint of what his own knowledge of the case was. Possibly they themselves would prefer not to press a charge against him, but if they did then he would say nothing, reserving his defence until he knew exactly what was the value of the charge against him. Then if the line of asserting that he had only taken the girl from the house looked too dangerous a one to follow he would, unwillingly enough, state the whole truth and fight it out. Here, then, was a policy, and the best that proffered itself. The letter was in his pocket-book, and now he destroyed the envelope. The clue of the red blind would explain his finding the house, and with the envelope destroyed he would not be obliged to explain why he did not go direct to Lees upon learning its contents.

He read through the long report again, but now, with this new reading, came a sudden sense of fear.

It was that stop-press telegram that looked so ugly. What would follow upon his arrest? Would he be given bail or locked away in some nightmare of a cell. The idea of a key being turned upon himself was horrible. And that would be only the preliminary. Suppose everything happened disastrously and he was convicted

of this serious-enough-looking charge—some sentence was actually inflicted upon him, some term of imprisonment, weeks or months of hideous incarceration?

He looked out of the window, and saw that they were drawing up in Praed Street and realised that he would have to change there to get to Brentford. He thrust the papers under the seat and went out on to the platform, walking out into the street and making his way towards Bishop's Road.

Out in the sunlit street the thought flashed across him: Why should he deliberately expose himself to this appalling risk? Down at the cottage there was safety—safety for both of them. It would compromise the girl, but what of that? It was a moment of shameful panic. He stood stock-still in the roadway just outside the station. There was a bookstall immediately under the glass roofing and his eyes travelled again to the huge type of the bills:

| | | |
|--------------------|--|--------------------|
| "AMAZING OUTRAGE." | | "DAYLIGHT CRIME." |
| "ARREST IMMINENT." | | "ARREST EXPECTED." |

He turned away from them; a great motor bus was coming down the road, and he saw "King's Cross" on the front of it. Acting entirely by impulse, he crossed the street and swung himself aboard. But the next moment he had muttered something about "wrong bus" to the conductor, who had helped him up by a grip on the arm, and sprang off again. Then he walked directly through Paddington Station and made his way to Bishop's Road. By the time his ticket had been punched and he had reached the platform complete reason had come back to him. He lit a cigarette and reflected with astonishment upon his sudden retreat

from the facing of this grotesque adventure. He even laughed at himself, as with his hands in his pockets and his hat pushed a little back on his head, he walked up and down the platform, a-gnawing at the cigarette between his lips being the only remaining sign of nervousness.

CHAPTER V

The Same Day. An Interview and Many New Experiences

It was certainly a curious sensation to be a "wanted" man. There were still the great staring placards, and in almost every hand he saw an evening paper, knew that in all those minds was the thought of the Pimlico affair and he laughed to himself.

What a dull world it was, after all! What preposterously dull faces everyone seemed to have. A young policeman was standing on the platform, and he thought what joy he could have given by walking up to him and delivering himself up. What excitement if he had stood up in the Brentford train, which happened to be a very crowded one, and exclaimed:

"I am Robert William Gilmour. I am the perpetrator of the Pimlico outrage. Here I am."

They looked as if they would all have run away.

He heard two young men talking.

"All right, isn't it?" said one. "Go into a house like that and carry a girl off—in broad daylight."

Broad daylight! That was what seemed to astonish everybody so much. As if human intelligence were so keen that nothing could be done except in inky darkness. And here was he sitting alongside of them and laughing to himself.

"Ought to be lynched," said the other man, and Gilmour felt a more uncomfortable sensation, until the first speaker remarked that his word could be taken that there was a good deal more behind it than met the eye.

He got out at Brentford and passed more policemen and more people, but he felt no shadow of nervousness, and when he met a postman he asked him the way to Inkerman Grange.

He found the postman was not obsessed by the name, but directed him in a matter-of-fact fashion, and twenty minutes later, when it was a little before two o'clock, he found himself entering upon what seemed almost a country road. On one side of him was a tall old park wall, of grimy yellow brick; on the other a meadow with the rank, soiled grass characteristic of urban pasture. The park wall seemed to continue indefinitely, but at last it was broken by a white painted lodge, and a fine old gateway of ornate ironwork, the pillars on either side being surmounted by the remarkable and time-worn representation of a wild cat wearing a coronet. There was a smaller gateway to the left of the large one, for admittance of foot passengers, and he found it guarded by a silk-hatted old man in the perpetual mourning of the family servant.

Gilmour inquired if this was Inkerman House.

"The lodge of it," was the answer, delivered with some pride of place. "Who is it that you want to see?"

Gilmour had not attended with any nicety to that morning's toilet. There was a day's growth of beard on his chin, which was quite enough for the ancient retainer to sum him up as no private caller.

"Mr. Henry Lees," Gilmour told him.

The lodgekeeper eyed him with something more than open suspicion, unmixed with anything approaching respect.

"Are you one of these here newspaper chaps?"

"No," said Gilmour.

"Are you sure?"

Hours of suppressed nervous excitement were suddenly and explosively let loose by Gilmour.

"Confound you, what are you questioning me about? Does Mr. Lees live at this place or doesn't he? If he does, where is his house?"

The lodgekeeper underwent a chameleonic change.

"Mr. Lees lives at the Grange, up the avenue to the right, sir."

Gilmour brushed past and, making his way up a wide drive, came within a few minutes into view of a small but extremely neat house, lying back at the end of a narrow drive of its own. It was quite an elaborate little establishment, surrounded by much shrubbery, and rendered blinding to the eye by a new coat of yellow paint. He went to the front door by way of a flight of steps, and obeyed a written request to both knock and ring. A few moments later and an elderly woman servant answered the summons.

"Is Mr. Henry Lees at home?" asked Gilmour.

"Are you one of the newspaper gentlemen?" enquired the woman.

"No, I am not," said Gilmour.

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure," he said grimly.

The woman asked him to step inside, closed the door, and disappeared down the hall.

He waited for some minutes, looking about him, and noting that the place was very comfortable, and well appointed with stuffed animals in cases.

Then he saw the woman coming back.

"Will you come this way, sir, please?"

Gilmour followed her down the hall, and at the end she opened a white door. He entered and found himself in a room with two men.

"Yes, sir?" said the elder, getting up.

He was a short, stout Scotchman, with a red beard and hair that seemed to have been clipped by scissors close to his head. He was a curiously hulking-looking man, breathing sonorously to a panting accompaniment that heaved his close-fitting tweed suit up and down at the shoulders. Bright brown eyes gleamed from beneath the red, protruding eyebrows, and another noticeable point about him was a pair of immense hands, which he kept spread out over his hips. He had advanced to the visitor with a slow movement, and when he spoke it was with a monosyllable pitched on the crest of a pant.

"Yes?"

"You are Mr. Henry Lees?" asked Gilmour.

The wave of his breath was receding, and the man waited until it had rolled back again.

"I am, sir." The voice itself was identical in its ill-humoured intonation to the voice that had come to him over the telephone in the early hours of the morning, only the Scotch accent was now much more noticeable.

Across the room a tall, middle-aged man with a sweeping black moustache was standing at the window, his back half turned to the visitor.

"That'll be Lord Inkerman, I suppose," thought

Gilmour to himself, before he spoke. Then he looked squarely at Mr. Lees.

"I thought I recognised your voice," he said coolly.

The Scotchman looked Gilmour up and down before answering.

"I'm not aware that I know you," he said bluntly.

"You do not," Gilmour answered. "But you've held a conversation with me, for all that. Didn't we chat about five o'clock this morning?"

Mr. Lees came a step nearer and his great head lifted.

"Was it you telephoned to me?"

"Yes," said Gilmour, and added nothing.

Here were two men, each anxious to commit the other, and the pause lengthened to the breaking-point.

The man at the window had turned about, and Gilmour, without looking towards him, knew that he also had come a step nearer.

"What do you know about this case, then?" asked the Scotchman abruptly.

"Everything," answered Gilmour.

There was a movement from the man by the window, a sudden turn towards Lees, but it was over in an instant, and Gilmour did not turn.

Already both men must have guessed that the man whom the police were looking for was in their presence, but there was only another long silence.

"So it was you who 'phoned, was it?" said Lees at last, speaking slowly, and evidently seeking to gain time.

"Yes," said Gilmour, "and I notice that the telephone conversation isn't mentioned in the papers. I thought I would draw your attention to the discrepancy. Also, I thought it would be interesting to

hear what you would have said over the wire if the panic hadn't seized you quite so soon as it did, and you hadn't rung off."

The Scotchman made a spasmodic movement with his lips, but no words came. For a full quarter of a minute he stared in silence into Gilmour's face, then he turned with a violent movement towards the lounging figure by the window.

"Your lordship!"

The man with the black moustache came slowly forward. Gilmour noted at once an extravagant affectation. He wore a most elegantly cut suit and advanced with a dreamy movement, his dark eyes half closed and a languid smile playing about a pair of almost vermilion lips. A little of this same vermilion colour also showed through the otherwise sallow skin, but his forehead and temples were of an alabaster whiteness, making a remarkable contrast to the coal-black, and clearly dyed, hair that was brushed back over the head and devoid of any parting.

"What's this?" Lord Inkerman drawled out, turning with his eyes almost shut now from his agent to the visitor.

"I beg you to take witness, your lordship," exclaimed Lees, "that I deny this gentleman's assertion that I held any conversation with him this morning. I was rung up, it's true, but absolutely no conversation took place. I waited, asking a dozen times what was wanted of me, and then rang off."

"What does the man want here now, anyway?" asked Inkerman.

Gilmour looked at him.

"I have called," he said, "for two reasons: to say that I hope that Miss Iris Lees is safely at home by

now, and to inquire how far you think it is safe to go with this little campaign of lies that you are engineering?"

"What do you mean?" almost shouted the Scotchman in Gilmour's face.

"I mean that your no doubt well-meant efforts are calculated to about settle the very Honourable Francis."

The two men were obviously utterly puzzled. Suddenly Lord Inkerman broke out into a loud laugh.

"Ha! ha! The valet—the chauffeur or whatever he is—the very Honourable Francis. Very good, very good. Ha, ha!"

Lees had not taken his eyes from his master while he spoke, and now he went suddenly to the door and placed his back to it.

"You're Robert Gilmour?" he asked.

"I am," said Gilmour.

"There's a warrant out for you, then. Do you know that?"

"I am amused to see it; yes."

"Amused? Do you think your position's funny?"

"Very," said Gilmour frankly.

There was another pause, while the man glared across at him with his breath heaving and falling in short gasps. Then abruptly he came forward and one of his great hands stretched out and took Gilmour by the arm.

"Where do you say the girl is?"

It was at the same moment that the door opened and the maid-servant gave admission to two other men.

"Mr. Francis," she announced, "and a gentleman."

Gilmour recognised that one of the two new-comers

was he whom he had last seen standing, white-faced, in the grey motor car outside Victoria Station. The other was a tall, broad-shouldered man in those plain clothes which form the striking uniform of a Scotland Yard detective.

Already the officer had fixed his eyes on Gilmour with interest and anticipation. Lees' hand on his shoulder had given him the clue to the stranger's possible identity, and he took a step forward. Already Lees, however, had dropped his hand, and seemed in complete doubt as to the wisest step to take. The police officer took it for him.

"You're Gilmour?" he said quickly.

Gilmour put his hands in his side pockets and nodded.

There was an instant's pause, and then the inspector spoke again.

"Take your hands out of those pockets, then."

Lord Inkerman stepped back quickly, and the Honourable Francis Bridges made a movement as if about to duck his head as Gilmour obeyed.

The detective himself looked Gilmour up and down with the expression of a man whose personal prowess has brought to a successful issue a most baffling undertaking.

Suddenly Francis Bridges spoke.

"What have you done with the girl?" he shouted, taking a step towards Gilmour.

But the police officer very promptly interposed himself between the two.

"Mr. Gilmour's my prisoner, sir," he said, with official nonchalance, "and I'm afraid he can't be questioned here." He had already produced a heavy notebook and now intoned an official formulæ :

"I warn you, Robert Gilmour, that any statement you may make now will be taken down, and may be produced as evidence against you. You're not obliged to say anything."

It was obviously too late for any compromise to be effected, and Gilmour preferred not to commit himself.

"I have nothing whatever to say here," he remarked.

Lord Inkerman himself turned to the detective.

"But hang it all, my man, he knows what he's done with the girl, and what have we put the matter in your hands for if it isn't to find her?"

"I can't help it, my lord," said the officer. "I'm afraid I can't allow the prisoner to be questioned."

"Perhaps Lord Inkerman would like a pair of thumb-screws," said Gilmour, but when he saw this remark carefully noted down in the large pocket-book he became silent again.

"Mr. Lees is an old and valued servant of mine," protested Inkerman. "I am only interested in the case because he is a member of my household, and the thing is a scandal. It's not this fellow that Lees wants, it's his daughter."

"All that'll come after, my lord," said the inspector, with almost nervous civility. "May I have your car, sir?" And he turned to Francis Bridges.

"My car? Certainly not," growled the young man, who seemed anything but comfortable himself. "The girl's own lover is driving it, isn't he? There'd be an accident before you'd gone a hundred yards."

The officer smiled.

"Would you ask for a taxi to be rung up then, sir?"

Francis Bridges turned about and went from the room

Lord Inkerman addressed himself to the detective again.

"I understood the prisoner—just before you came here—to ask if the girl had not returned home. At least you can ask him why he thinks the girl's come back."

"I can ask him nothing, my lord."

"But Mr. Lees here might be prepared to drop the case if he got any satisfactory explanation."

"Too late to drop it now, my lord. The warrant's out, you see, and I'm bound to execute it."

Lord Inkerman stood back, and only a steady stroking of his moustache betrayed his anxiety. Lees had not spoken since the inspector had entered the room. He had stood breathing more heavily than ever and with his eyes seeking his master's.

Gilmour, on the whole, enjoyed the situation. He had expected to be arrested, and so far, at least, the proceedings seemed well in his own favour, and exceedingly polite and even dignified.

Lord Inkerman as well as Lees now preserved an unbroken silence, and the inspector kept near his prisoner and stared stolidly towards the door.

When it opened it was to admit the servant, who announced that a cab was waiting. Francis Bridges did not reappear.

The officer turned to Lord Inkerman.

"The charge won't be heard until to-morrow morning, my lord," he said. "Not by the magistrate. The inspector, of course, will take it at once. If you're at Dorchester Row by eleven o'clock to-morrow morning, you'll be in good time. It'll be about the first case heard immediately after the drunks and night charges."

"I am not the prosecutor," almost shouted Lord

Inkerman at him. "Mr. Lees here is the prosecutor. The case has nothing to do with me."

"You heard, then, sir," said the inspector to Henry Lees.

"I'll be there," growled out the agent.

Gilmour and his captor turned to the door and passed out from the house, leaving Inkerman and his agent staring at one another.

"There's one thing," Gilmour soliloquised, as he got into the taxi-cab, "Iris is all right for the moment."

It was extraordinary how quickly this thing had become matter of fact. Twenty-four hours before Gilmour had never heard of Iris in his life, or exchanged a word with a police inspector. Now, here he was getting into a cab under arrest and saying comfortably to himself, "Iris is all right!"

The servants on the premises had already heard the news and there was a little knot just inside the lodge gates. They looked curiously at Gilmour as the car swung round into the main road, and wondered at the somewhat precise-looking young man who sat beside the uniformed inspector.

The man at the lodge perhaps extracted more real satisfaction from the sight than any of those who saw the cab drive away from Inkerman Lodge. He had been much perturbed in his mind as to Gilmour's real social status, but the explanation that he was a man the police wanted was entirely satisfactory.

From the windows of the room in the Grange where the interview had taken place, Inkerman and Lees were watching. It was when the taxi-cab had veered about at the end of the smaller drive, and been swallowed up in the foliage of the larger, that Lord Inkerman turned with a livid face to his agent.

"Damn your daughter, Lees!"

"I'm very sorry for it all, my lord," said the Scotchman, "but she's no flesh or blood of mine. I've only brought it on myself by trying to do a kindness."

"No flesh and blood of yours, no," exclaimed his lordship. "If she was, there wouldn't be this fuss and trouble. It's her damned good looks!"

Lees, however, missed the point of this subtle reasoning.

Gilmour meanwhile was extracting a curious pleasure from the ride. It was so full of rare sensations.

At every street corner he saw the pink or white or green placards with their huge type, telling of the "Amazing Abduction."

"Made yourself pretty notorious," said the inspector amiably when the cab had got well on its way.

Gilmour agreed.

"It's what these newspaper chaps call 'a good story.' They ought to be pretty grateful to you."

"They probably are," said Gilmour.

Presently the inspector touched his arm and turned him round to look towards the pavement. They were nearing Victoria Station again. It was almost the same spot where that morning he had passed the grey car. It was then just ten minutes to three o'clock.

"Look at that!" said the officer. "That's how the beggars work nowadays. It's smart, very smart."

Gilmour looked.

Up the street a newspaper cart had just flung a parcel of a special edition into a knot of waiting boys, and already they were racing along, unfolding their contents bills as they ran. Gilmour was just able to read one, and it ran

"PIMLICO CASE**MAN****ARRESTED."**

The inspector pulled out his watch.

"Just under thirty-five minutes," he said.

Gilmour laughed, almost with exhilaration. The fact was that he hardly yet realised his position; had not really associated himself with it all.

He received something of a shock, however, when, a few minutes later, the cab turned into Dorchester Row and he saw a considerable crowd gathered about the entrance to the police station.

"They can't take this interest in me," he said to the inspector.

"I don't know," said the officer. "There's something about this case that just touches the spot. It may be the—the other people mentioned in it, and it happens to be quiet just now as far as news goes and all that."

"But how do they know I'm coming here?"

"Oh, that'll be the photographers. You'll probably find a lot of them waiting for you, and they've drawn the crowd."

It was quite true. As they drew up outside the entrance to the police station, and a couple of constables cleared back the throng of sight-seers, Gilmour observed a little lane of men with black cameras.

It was a fantastic moment as he was hurried past them and caught a glimpse of at least half-a-dozen of the instruments being aimed at him, each according to the operator's own peculiar method; one man, for instance, was holding his apparatus shoulder high and squinting sideways along it. The shutters snapped

with the precision of a volley at a military execution, and there was almost the same dead silence.

The next moment and the swinging doors had closed upon him and Gilmour found himself switched abruptly off from all this seeming unreality, to the cold, ugly and altogether unromantic formality of being handed over to justice.

It was anything but a pleasing experience, this interrogation at the superintendent's desk, and the unceremonious operation of being searched. The magistrate had gone for the day; the acceptance of recognisances for his appearance was out of the question, and he learnt that nothing could happen now until the following morning. Yet the excitement kept him up a little. He still made no statement of any sort, refused the opportunity of calling in a solicitor, and finally found himself being led off to a cell.

It was a curious moment as a young, hatless policeman conducted him almost deferentially away down a newly built and artistic-looking corridor leading to the cells. So far the inside of the station had seemed almost cheerful. Uniformed clerks were sitting at desks and going about their work much like the clerks in any other business concern, but now when the young policeman unlocked one of the corridor doors and opened it wide for him to enter, Gilmour felt the first tremor of alarm.

CHAPTER VI

The End of the First Day and the Commencement of the Second.

Press Notices and Dock Tricks—The Indictment—The Letter makes a Loophole—The Way out—Gilmour makes a Joke and is Discharged.

GILMOUR, when he heard the key turn in the iron door, told himself that there were only two alternatives. One was to stubbornly refuse to realise where he was, the other was probably to lose his reason.

A tremor somewhere in the void at the back of his imagination had warned him, when he heard the key being turned, that he was on the verge of becoming a victim to panic. He was confronted, for the first time in his life, with some knowledge of the utter impotency of a caged thing, and he knew that he must either master his imagination or it would master him.

He felt utterly unlike sitting down, yet he laid himself at full length on a bench under the glazed walls and made a sheer blank of his brain.

He was, as it proved, however, somewhat exaggerating the horror of his position, for he had not lain in this fashion for many minutes before another young policeman opened the cell door and asked if he would like anything. He found that he could have newspapers, books and food practically without restriction, and sitting up again he sent out for a substantial meal.

"Do you wish to send for any friends?"

He did not wish to. And when a very neat tray of edibles was sent in and he had put it on the bench before him, with a pile of all the latest papers, every-one of them containing the most interesting references to himself, he found that his condition was several degrees less disagreeable than he had anticipated.

Thus did he get through a long afternoon and evening, finally laying himself down again and managing his nerves with such complete success that he slept through the whole night, and only awoke in daylight, to lie and think out, with the utmost care, the tactics for his defence.

As for Iris, he had absolutely refused to think of her at all.

He had prepared her in some measure for the possibility of his not returning to the cottage on the previous night, and he would not distress himself about the future, since as yet he knew nothing about it. He had also found infinite danger to his self-control in recalling anything like a mental picture of her. She had to be kept firmly in the background, while he made up his mind as to the best way of getting free and putting himself in a position to be useful to her.

From the manner of both Inkerman and Lees he had much hope that the charge would not be very vigorously pressed; at the moment of his arrest they had even hinted at dropping it, and he was determined to give them every opportunity, when the case was heard, to do so. He would say nothing until the last possible moment. Then he would choose between taking his perjured oath that he had done no more than take her from the house, or he would let the whole truth out, and fight them.

In his examination by the superintendent, when they had searched him, he had pointed to the letter and said that he would rely upon it for his defence. He had made no other statement whatever, and he would leave it at that, then. Silence up to the last possible moment, and then a rapid decision as to which of the two courses open to him he was to take.

He rose from his bed feeling all vestige of the last night's horror gone. He sent out for clean linen, bought a safety razor, with which he was allowed to shave himself, dressed with a nice care, made a good breakfast, and finally sat down to the morning papers.

Certainly he had never found them so interesting at any other period in his life. There was a full page of photographs of himself alighting at the police station displayed in every illustrated paper, and more than one of the commonly unillustrated papers published a small half-tone portrait. His personal appearance was much discussed, and there were many interesting versions as to what happened at his arrest, as well as certain particulars as to his own private past of which he was not himself cognisant.

Of Iris Lees there were, however, no portraits, for it happened that she had not been photographed since childhood.

More to the point, however, than all these personal details was a veiled allusion in one of the papers to the coincidence of the name Francis being also the name of the chauffeur's master. It was so innocently worded that Gilmour himself could not be certain whether it was suggestive of anything deeper or not. The paper had discovered that Francis Bridges was in the car when Lees had passed his daughter escaping in the

taxi-cab, and the allusion was only possibly deliberate and not accidental. In every account, however, the name of Inkerman seemed quoted largely, though it was more than probable that it was merely to lend interest to the case.

The perusal of all this matter passed the morning almost pleasantly away, and a few minutes after eleven o'clock another young policeman opened the cell door and intimated that Gilmour was to follow him.

They went together through a new variety of corridors, and finally arrived outside a very ornate door at the end of the building, where a string of other prisoners were awaiting their hearing. This part of the business was decidedly disagreeable, for the waiting people represented the tail-end of the "night charges," including a number of faithful representatives of those transparently demented degenerates who are the backbone of our metropolitan judicature.

These cases were disposed of with remarkable rapidity, and before Gilmour had waited many minutes someone looked through the doors and called out, "Number Thirty-three."

"You," said the policeman who had charge of him, and touched his arm. Gilmour walked forward, the door was held open for him, and he found himself stepping into the court itself.

It was a different sensation from any aroused by his previous experiences. The sordidness of the atmosphere of a police court is unconquerable. A modern architect had done his best in this decidedly artistic building, but he had failed inevitably, except to accentuate the law that art is subservient to purpose.

Gilmour caught a blurred vision of a sea of faces to his left, the green painted ironwork of a dock before him, and the magistrate's dais to his right. Everywhere there were faces all turned towards him, and he heard the murmur of a hundred excited whispering voices as he appeared.

In the moment while he was walking towards the dock he reflected that it was useless trying to look dignified, and he made the better impression by stepping hesitatingly into the iron structure.

Once before in his life he had found himself in a police court, but only as a respectable spectator, and he recollected vividly a young man of about his own age who had entered the dock, and exactly how he behaved. He recalled a jaunty step, a quick lift of the head as he took his place exactly in the middle, and then a swift look round the court, ending with a introspective smile. Gilmour forced himself to do the exact opposite of all these things, and for this reason was spared the recognition of many familiar faces back among the sight-seers.

Directly in front of him was an imposing dais and a very imposing white-haired old gentleman, with his hands folded in front of him on a desk. The expression was that practised one of benign dotage which is a London magisterial characteristic, and checking himself from another dock trick, of straightening his coat, he looked towards the white head.

"Robert William Gilmour?" asked the magistrate, taking up the charge sheet.

"Yes, sir," answered Gilmour.

"You are charged, I see, with taking a young woman under the age of eighteen years from out of the custody of her friends and against her will."

Gilmour bowed, feeling himself expected to make some acknowledgment of this soft impeachment.

"That's all," said the magistrate, lifting a snowy hand. "Your opportunity to speak will come later. Inspector Few."

The court was stiflingly hot with an oppressive odour, and Gilmour stood through a monotonous recitation of the account of his arrest.

There is much repetition in such evidence, and he found himself looking about him at the people in the well of the court.

He recognised practically every person to do with the case.

There was Mrs. Francis in a bonnet replete with coloured ribbons, and a pale-faced and very sinister-looking young man whom he presumed to be Francis, the valet, or chauffeur. Also there was Mr. Henry Lees. But of Lord Inkerman or the Honourable Francis Bridges he saw nothing.

The little servant, Louisa, he had noticed without recognition until presently she looked towards him, and then his interest became considerably aroused. In the few hours since he had last seen her she had changed as if into another being.

It was not merely her clothes—for she wore a new jacket and hat—it was her manner and her expression. She was looking across at Gilmour with a look that was altogether independent, and which clearly told him she was prepared to deny anything he might have to say. It was not a cowed or bullied appearance, it was mere pertness, and he guessed that the pressure that had been brought to bear upon her was substantial bribery.

"Acting on the information laid before your worship

at this court yesterday morning," the detective had commenced. After Gilmour had killed at least ten minutes by his speculative examination of the prosecuting party, the officer had barely reached the story of his arrest. The court writer seemed interminably slow, and even the public were beginning to cough, after the manner of bored audiences, when the first ripple of amusement was aroused by the reference to the thumb-screws.

"I understand that Lord Inkerman was present and wished to question the prisoner," said the magistrate.

"Yes, your worship, Lord Inkerman and the Honourable Francis Bridges, but as the prisoner did not wish to make any statement I did not allow him to be questioned."

"These gentlemen happened to be present in the room at the time of the arrest?"

"Yes, your worship."

Gilmour noticed the reporters fall to over their books.

Presently the details of the taking of the charge at the police station were gone into, and the letter was handed up.

"It was in a pocket-book of the prisoner's," explained the detective, "and he said that he relied upon it for his defence."

"What did he say exactly?" asked the magistrate irritably.

The officer referred to his notebook.

"The exact words, your worship, were, 'Hold on to that letter there, I rely upon it for my defence.'"

There was another small laugh, and the letter was handed up to the magistrate and then to the clerk, who read it out:

"DEAR FATHER,—You will have heard from Eastbourne. I am sorry now. Of course it was Francis, so I suppose you were right, but I have not seen him again since he brought me here. I frightened him, and it is not too late. It is the house of the man Francis's mother. It is near Victoria Station, a house behind some mews, and I am in a room with a red blind to it. Whether you forgive me or not, I implore you to come to me at once, or, of course, I shall simply have got myself ruined.—IRIS."

The letter had been read in complete silence, but at the conclusion there was a stir of suppressed excitement.

The magistrate leaned back in his seat, folding his white hands, and there was still silence.

"Was there any envelope to this letter?"

"No envelope, sir."

For several seconds the magistrate simply smoothed his hands over one another. Then he looked towards the superintendent, who sat at a desk beside the dock.

"Is the prosecutor here—the girl's father? I know the solicitor is here, but where's the father?"

Henry Lees stood up at his seat. His red face was almost apoplectic in its colour.

During the reading of the letter Gilmour had noted him in anxious, whispered conversation with the man who was apparently legally representing him, and who now also rose to his feet.

"Hand the letter to the prosecutor," said the magistrate, "and ask if it is in his daughter's handwriting."

The clerk gave the letter to Lees, and after perusing it he handed it back.

"Is that your daughter's handwriting?"

"Yes, your worship. Certainly."

The man whom Gilmour had taken to be the solicitor motioned to Lees to sit back, and then this new pawn in the strange game turned to the magistrate and addressed him.

"Your worship," he said, "my client, Mr. Lees, agrees with me that this letter puts a very different complexion upon the affair. Miss Lees is undoubtedly a young lady of an excitable and hysterical temperament, and it appears from a statement made by the defendant to the father immediately before the arrest that he innocently believed the young lady to have already gone home. From this it might seem that the defendant chanced upon the letter and that it was merely a quixotic action upon his part to go to the house and remove her from it. Your worship, if the defendant can satisfactorily explain how he came by the letter, and there may be some perfectly simple explanation, and if his defence is that, finding the letter, he merely acted upon it, I shall not propose to offer any further evidence against him. Indeed, the charge being based upon the removal of the young lady against her will, it cannot very well be sustained further. In view of her age the act of abduction is, in fact, hardly complete."

Gilmour felt a stirring sensation of triumph. The prosecution, then, were anxious, as he had anticipated, to drop the matter; were even pointing him the way out. And it was the way that he had hoped for.

The magistrate leaned forward at his desk again, and for some moments continued to fold and unfold and stroke his white hands. Then he affixed a pair of

glasses on the bridge of his nose and for some further seconds stared at Gilmour.

"If you have any statement that you wish to make," he said, "you may go into the box and be sworn."

Gilmour straightened himself up; then he left the dock and took the oath.

"Your worship," he said, "I have a statement to make, but it is a very brief one. I only have to say that having picked that letter up at three o'clock yesterday morning, in Childrey Street, Pimlico, I certainly did in an impulsive moment go to the house mentioned in it, and conduct a young lady from the premises, although I entirely deny the statement which appears in the newspapers to the effect that the lady accompanied me against her will."

"I know nothing about the papers," said the magistrate testily, "but it is certainly part of the indictment. Where do you say you found the letter?"

"In Childrey Street, your worship, very near to No. 42—the house in question."

"But how did you know where to go? There is no street or number mentioned in the letter—nothing whatever to guide you."

"The red blind, your worship. I knew there was a mews close to where I found the letter, and when I had decided to act upon it I went into the mews and saw a red blind in one of the back windows."

"Was there any envelope on the letter? I presume there was, as it is perfectly clean."

"There was an envelope, your worship, but the address was entirely obliterated. There had been a storm."

"A what?"

"A storm, your worship."

"And what were you doing walking about in Pimlico in a storm at three o'clock in the morning?"

"I was returning from a supper-party with friends."

"Oh! So you found this obliterated envelope on the top of a supper-party, and opened it?"

"The rain had loosened the gum. It was practically open, but I took it home and tried to decipher the address before I looked at the contents. When I read the letter I felt that it was my duty to do something."

"How did you know it was not a hoax? Anyone might write a letter like that and throw it in the street."

"I felt sure that it was not a hoax, and I was right, apparently, in my assumption."

"There was no stamp on the envelope?"

No stamp, sir."

Well, you read this letter, traced the house and went there, I understand, at six o'clock. What had you been doing in the meantime?"

"Changing my clothes. I was wet through. But I certainly did practically all that has been alleged against me. I went to the house and took the lady away from it, certainly against the wishes of the woman Mrs. Francis. The lady herself went perfectly willingly, although she was perhaps a little excited, and I took her in a cab to Paddington, as she said she lived at Brentford and could get home easily from there. Afterwards I went for a long walk and at about half-past eleven noticed the placards and bought a paper. I immediately went to the address at Brentford mentioned in the papers, hoping to explain things, but I was arrested. I claim that I did all that I did do out of what I conceived to be a sense of duty. And I would

add that the young lady appeared to be at least twenty years of age."

While Gilmour had been speaking both Mrs. Francis and the girl Louisa had made separate attempts at interruption, but had been silenced by the solicitor, who now rose quickly to his feet.

"Your worship," he said, "my client is perfectly satisfied that the prisoner had no ulterior motive, and accepts his explanation. My client does not propose to offer any further evidence against the prisoner."

The magistrate had not moved his eyes from Gilmour, and now he whispered to his clerk. Some sort of consultation followed, and at last he looked up again.

"The letter does not appear to coincide very precisely with the information laid before me," he remarked. "If the young lady eloped from the school at Eastbourne and was forgiven, how does she come to be writing in this strain?"

Mr. Lees stood up. In his only too obvious nervousness he spoke slowly, labouring for his words.

"It is quite clear, your worship; if I need go into such matters. The young man Francis fetched the girl from Eastbourne and took her to his home in Childrey Street; and when they arrived there his mother locked her in a room and very properly sent for me. I did not see the girl—I would not just then, for I was very angry—but I saw the young man. In the end I gave my consent to a marriage, but I said she was to stay in her room under the care of Mrs. Francis until the ceremony was performed. That was the night before last. As I say, I did not see her, and I think that quite early in that evening, before I reached the house, she wrote this letter to send to me, but that it got dropped in the street somehow."

"Who posted it, if she was locked in a room?"

"I don't know. Someone in the house might have taken it for her."

"But was she not informed that you had called—and that you had consented to the marriage?"

"Afterwards, yes. The letter must have been written before she heard that. Then when the young man called she probably went with him because she was annoyed at being still kept to her room. I had left those instructions because Mrs. Francis, who was as annoyed as myself, thought it would only be proper."

"You are satisfied, then, that the prisoner's motive was innocent?"

"Yes, sir, I am quite satisfied."

"You wish to withdraw the charge against him?"

"Yes, sir. I'm quite satisfied that he meant no harm."

The magistrate looked at Lees for some moments. Then he bent forward.

"I must ask the prisoner why he did not hand the letter to the police, instead of acting upon it himself."

"Because," Gilmour answered, "I felt that delay was dangerous."

He was a little astonished at the burst of laughter that followed this reply, which was apparently taken as an ingenious sally. The magistrate himself smiled, and the superintendent at his desk rubbed his mouth with quite good-humoured enjoyment.

A police officer motioned Gilmour to leave the witness-box, and the gaoler whispered to him as he was about to step back into the dock:

"Wait a minute, sir; I think you're all right."

Gilmour stood, waiting at the side of the dock, and then the magistrate moved abruptly back in his chair and pushed the papers on his desk away from him.

"I discharge the prisoner," he said curtly.

CHAPTER VII

Second Day. The Man with the Camera and the Lady with a Curl—Gilmour accepts a Card and receives a fresh Shock—An irritating Smile and final Flight—Hyde and Seek—Capture and an Interview.

DISCHARGED! Gilmour looked about him for the nearest exit, and there was some clapping.

"What do they know about it?" he said to himself. But he was keeping his thoughts back for the present and they thronged at a white heat of excitement about the portals of his brain. The thing had happened so very happily; he did not appear even to have committed perjury. But he would not procrastinate an instant now; he would simply fly the building, and, if he could, the memories of it.

"This way, sir," said the detective who had effected his arrest, opening a door across the court and looking very genially into his late prisoner's face.

"All ended very well, sir," he remarked in a cheerful whisper.

"Thank heaven, yes," said Gilmour.

He was out of the building and striding away towards the Vauxhall Bridge Road before the little crowd of friends and reporters had got out of the building to intercept him.

It was a clear, sunny morning, with strong shadows, and the people in the street looking like well-defined

snapshots. The world looked extraordinarily quiet and sleepy, for during the last twenty-four hours the velocity of everybody's gyrations had seemed immensely increased; out here the wheel appeared to be spinning slowly again.

Yet, he realised, the strange business was only just beginning. He had not ended it, but made a new beginning and of a very complicated order.

He found himself talking aloud, but not at a moment when anyone might have overheard him. "No, I have not committed perjury. I certainly took Iris to Paddington. That solicitor most ingeniously influenced the court by suggestion, and suggestion only."

He had good reason to be satisfied with the way matters had turned out, but the serious question now was what had to be done about Iris.

In leaving the court he had had to turn somewhere. and instinctively he had taken the direction of his flat in St. George's Square, but now he thought to himself that he had better think twice before he went there, and he turned off towards Victoria Station and decided to gain time by a light lunch in one of the little Continental restaurants in Wilton Street.

He had not noticed that one person, at least, had followed him from the court.

As a matter of fact, a young man with a camera had hurried after him, but had changed his mind after a rapid pursuit of some two hundred yards. This was a photographer on the staff of one of the inevitable illustrated papers, and he had decided in the end that the interest in the "story" had fizzled out, and that a snapshot would probably not be worth getting. But he happened to wear a very light suit, and

this was apparently a kind of scent to a second person.

It was a quite young woman in a neat mauve-coloured, tailor-made dress who had noticed the photographer in the court and had seen him leave on the heels of the discharged prisoner. Now that she saw him racing down the road she thought to herself that Mr. Gilmour was not far away.

She passed the young man just after he had turned back.

"Was that Gilmour?" she asked.

"Yes," said the young man. "He's gone on towards Victoria Station, but I don't want him. I think it's fugged out, don't you?"

"Perhaps it has," answered the young lady, and went on quickly.

The young man looked after her.

"I wonder what paper she's on?" he soliloquised. "I suppose they'll send 'em out with the cameras next!"

He turned away, somewhat depressed. He had missed any underlying suggestion of further mystery in this Pimlico Abduction Case, and simply saw with disgust the premature collapse of what had promised to be several days' good copy. But it was ever thus. A good story would blaze up on the journalistic horizon, attract all eyes for one brief, blinding moment, and then sink again into a nameless oblivion. He lived in a world where nothing seemed to last the clock round, and being young he felt it. He had lived to see the two Poles found, Manchester flown to, the Channel swum again, and all the heroes of these epoch-making events hardly worth a six-inch photograph a week later.

Meanwhile the young lady had, however, kept up the chase, and catching sight of Gilmour's tall figure she walked on a little way behind him.

She had a pretty and intelligent face, with blue eyes and flaxen hair.

The surprising thing about the countenance was a kind of alert hardness. One could hardly imagine a woman who looked better able to take care of herself, though she was obviously in her very early twenties.

When Gilmour entered the restaurant she went in after him and sat down at the next table.

It was hardly twelve o'clock, and the place was quite empty, except for the usual staff of little dark Italians with black moustaches and close cropped-hair waiting in melancholy expectation about the tables, and one of them put the young lady out a chair at a table some distance from where Gilmour had sat. She merely ignored it and sat where she chose.

Gilmour had not in the least noticed her. He called for a salad and a bottle of a white wine, and when it was in front of him he commenced the repast, but with his mind wandering. The young lady ordered lemonade—lemonade and Gruyère cheese and a horseshoe roll, to be exact.

The decision which Gilmour had just come to, and he was sipping his wine over it, was that he had better make his way quickly and quietly down to the Hertfordshire cottage.

The case had been entirely dropped, and there was no reason now why he should fear any danger in making his way, with a little caution, back to Hertfordshire. All his yesterday sensations of thrilled

expectation came back to him when he thought of Iris again, and of going to her alone, in the little house, but he pulled himself up with some abruptness. There could be no question of her staying there. Probably she would, willingly enough, but he would simply have to make some other arrangements for her and bid good-bye to the adventure. He might lend her enough money to go completely away, but anything in the shape of encouraging her to stay at the cottage was in the nature of taking advantage of her position, and could not be permitted.

Here again he found two distinct halves of himself manifesting their presence.

There was the judicious half, which appeared to be his real self and, certainly, the stronger of the two, and there was another section of his mind which he felt to be lying in ambush, and only waiting until he got down to the cottage again to spring out upon him and do its best to devour all these calm reasonings.

Gilmour was distinctly afraid of himself, or afraid of Iris, as has been pointed out.

He was completely lost in the abstraction of these thoughts when he saw the other customer leave her table and bring her chair to his. It took him a moment to switch his brain on to the incident.

"Mr. Gilmour," said the young lady, in an American and matter-of-fact accent, "I want to speak to you."

"I beg your pardon," said Gilmour, putting down his glass.

"I want to speak to you on a matter of pure business. I'd better give you my card."

The young lady, smiling as she did so, had already

unclasped a grey crocodile-skin satchel, and taking a card-case from inside it of the same material, still smiling, took from the latter a small, man's sized visiting card, and handed it to Gilmour.

Gilmour, who was less taken aback than he would have been but for the series of unexpected occurrences in the last two days, accepted the card and read it.

There was an inscription in small, neat type :

"MISS IRENE GOLDSTONE,
Private Inquiry Agent.

40B Chancery Lane, E.C."

Gilmour looked at the card and shook his head.

"I am afraid, madam, I cannot avail myself of your services," he said.

Irene Goldstone shook her own head and smiled again.

"I'm already engaged, Mr. Gilmour," she said in an irritatingly amused voice. "I represent the other side, and I want a chat with you."

Gilmour felt a wave of intense annoyance.

Was he to be followed and harassed in this fashion now that the case was apparently closed? He remembered now that this lady customer had come in immediately after he had, and realised that she must have shadowed him to the restaurant. Yet it was difficult to be altogether curt. She was a woman, and a decidedly pretty and ladylike one. Nevertheless he spoke with some irritation.

"The matter's done with," he said. "I've been discharged and I want no more to do with it."

The young lady laughed audibly, moving her head

slowly from side to side and with her blue eyes never flinching from his own.

"Mr. Gilmour, do you really think you would have escaped as easily as that if my party had had the least desire to detain you? No, Mr. Gilmour, you don't think any such thing, and I want to arrange a meeting now between all three of us—you and me and Mr. Lees."

The American drawl span out the sentence, cutting each syllable up into almost a complete word, and all the time she continued to smile exasperatingly.

"I've done with Lees," said Gilmour angrily.

Miss Goldstone shook her head again.

"No," she said suavely, "you have only just begun with him, Mr. Gilmour, and with me, and with all of us. Now, I will be perfectly frank. You are a chivalrous young man, and I admire chivalry. I was brought up in a country where we women are taught not only to admire it, but to expect it, but what you have done has only been to help a thoughtless English girl, very badly brought up, and without any self-discipline, to throw away the passion of her life."

"Upon my soul!" exclaimed Gilmour.

"It may be on your soul, Mr. Gilmour. When you have read the letters of this girl to her chauffeur lover you will begin to see your error. It's all been a very unfortunate mistake—a case of common enough hysteria, and we must put it right."

Gilmour was already struggling to check the exasperation which he felt. The weaker part of him was anxious to talk, the wiser part told him to keep quiet and let this American lady do the talking.

"Put it right if you can," he said coolly. "The girl's probably home by now."

And again Irene Goldstone's head moved from side to side.

"Mr. Gilmour," she said slowly, "it's quite useless. We have let you off because you know where the girl is and you are going to tell us. Frankly, we allowed you to perjure yourself very neatly this morning, that an amicable arrangement might be arrived at outside the court. It was a wise course for you to take, but you must agree that you dare not go back on it."

"I did not take my oath that I had left the girl at Paddington," exclaimed Gilmour, and the little woman was on him at once.

"That's a confession in itself, Mr. Gilmour," she exclaimed, in her drawling tones. "Now, Mr. Lees has gone on to my office in Chancery Lane and I want you to go there too."

"I will go to the devil first," said Gilmour, and calling a waiter, settled with him.

Irene Goldstone waited until the man had gone, then she leaned a little across the table.

"I don't think you will go there, Mr. Gilmour. I can tell you where you will go, though. You'll go to Iris Lees, and I shall be close behind you."

Gilmour stared at her. He saw the sharp little eyes with a puckered row of lines in the flesh about the sides of them as she still smiled into his face. He saw the half-parted lips, revealing a row of small even teeth. A little golden curl had escaped from under her hat and fell against her forehead. It was a pretty face, but the perpetual smile had made it hideous to his sight.

He noticed quickly that she had not paid for what she had eaten, and simultaneously she called a waiter for her bill. Instantly he lifted his hat and strode out at the door.

Out in the street he almost ran, muttering that he would throw the little cat off. There was a crowd of traffic outside and he walked recklessly through it, and into the Victoria Station. Here he made his way into the Buckingham Palace Road and leapt into a passing taxi-cab.

"Baker Street Station, as quick as you can," he called out to the man.

King's Cross was his destination, but he decided to get to the Underground railway first.

The cab dashed off and raced along up Grosvenor Place, but there was a block in the traffic at Hyde Park Corner.

Gilmour, eaten up with impatience, looked back at the line of vehicles behind them, and there, in another cab immediately in his rear, sat Irene Goldstone.

She still wore her haunting smile, and as Gilmour stared in recognition she bowed and very slightly waved a gloved hand.

He made up his mind at once, left the cab, and walked quickly towards Piccadilly. The block of the traffic was holding up the east-bound busses, but he crossed the road and mounted one that had just got clear and was going towards Kensington. Then, almost immediately, he alighted again. He had seen the Tube station at the corner of the hospital, and walking quickly to the booking-office purchased a ticket for King's Cross.

He had acted promptly enough to feel with some confidence that he had thrown off the woman, but just as the lift gates were being closed she entered.

This time she made no sign of recognition, and during the descent of the lift Gilmour decided on a new plan for shaking off his pursuer. He went on to the platform, passed through a crowd of people to the

one opposite, and from there made his way up the steps that led to the street.

When he came out at the top he found Miss Goldstone smilingly awaiting him at the exit.

"You see it's no use, Mr. Gilmour. You may do this sort of thing all day," she said sweetly.

"I've a mind to give you in charge," said Gilmour furiously.

"I don't think so," answered the other. "You'd much better come along to Chancery Lane and chat it over. It's so silly."

"All right," said Gilmour sullenly.

To get rid of the woman seemed impossible. He would go with her, and await his chance. He could certainly do nothing about getting to the cottage while this condition of affairs lasted, and if he saw Lees there was no need for him to commit himself.

"Now you're sensible," said Miss Goldstone. "You've got a shrewd head, Mr. Gilmour, and I'm glad to see you using it."

"Thanks," he said dryly.

They took cab again, and during the journey he refused to enter into a conversation. About half-way up Chancery Lane the vehicle stopped, and the little lady led the way up to a suite of offices on the second floor.

It was all very ornate, looking more like a chiropodist's than a private detective agency, with its white painted woodwork and colour-glass partitions.

"Is Mr. Ninety-three here?" she asked of a woman clerk in the outer office.

"Yes, madame," the clerk answered. "He is waiting in the consulting-room, with two other gentlemen."

"Do you know who?"

"Yes, madame; Numbers Ninety-four and Ninety-five."

"Ah," said Miss Goldstone, and leaving the office they travelled up two further flights of stairs until the topmost floor of the building had been reached.

"You smoke too much," she remarked once, stopping to wait for Gilmour, who was not disposed to race the stairs in her wake.

"One relies on lifts nowadays," he answered savagely.

"This is London," she said, "and Chancery Lane; an old building saturated with the folk-lore of the city. The spirit of the place is compensation enough to me for the absence of an elevator. It's quite true that I might situate my office on the ground floor—I do interview old or gouty clients there—but there is nothing like the top floor of a building for privacy. You don't get passers-by. By the time you get to the roof you've sifted out the people whose business is elsewhere."

Her very affability infuriated Gilmour to a pitch of speechless annoyance. He growled out an unintelligible rejoinder, and the next moment they had arrived at a narrow landing illuminated by a smoky skylight.

"Here we are," she exclaimed brightly, and opened a green-baize door in the wall. It revealed a second and ordinary door within. She opened this second door and it revealed a third, of green baize again. Thus, as if opening the leaves of a book, they entered into a large and well-lit room.

"So these are Nineties Three, Four and Five," thought Gilmour to himself as he recognised Lord Inkerman and his son, standing by the window at the

farther end of the room in interrupted conversation with the Scotch agent.

They turned towards him, and Miss Goldstone closed the door.

"Mr. Gilmour," she said, "come to talk business."

CHAPTER VIII

The Second Day. What went before the Interview and what happened in it—Irene shows some Feeling—High Ideals—Gilmour makes a rapid Exit.

FOR half-an-hour, previously, Inkerman, Lees and Francis Bridges had stood, in agitated conclave, inside Miss Goldstone's sanctum.

The American detective had been called in by Inkerman immediately after Gilmour's arrest on the previous afternoon, and he and his son Francis had arrived at Chancery Lane at about the same time that the case was to be heard at Dorchester Row. There they had awaited news during a long morning of suspense.

Francis Bridges had obtained a week's leave of absence, which had commenced on the last Monday, no doubt in anticipation of his gallant affair with Iris Lees, and having no excuse to quit Inkerman House had already had nearly enough of his father. Lord Inkerman was furious at the muddle that his son had got himself into, by what he described as his sheer ineptitude.

After the invention of the chauffeur story on the previous morning, when it had been discovered that Iris had left the house with Gilmour, Bridges had attempted to make his father swallow it also, but without any success. Inkerman, however, had approved

of it as an easily passable explanation, and was concerned only in its being stood by through thick and thin. He had advised the case against Gilmour not being pressed, and now waited with his son to hear what had happened at the court.

Lees had arrived a little before twelve o'clock and had assured them that all had gone off well. They had successfully abandoned the charge, and, as far as he could see, nothing had come out in the court to complicate matters. When the papers were out they would know more, but he was quite satisfied that all had gone off satisfactorily and that the matter would be dropped. Certainly if the girl herself could be discovered, and it could be announced that she had gone home, he believed it would end the matter. The chauffeur marriage he hardly regarded as a serious proposition.

They were still waiting, trying to make the best of the outlook, when Bridges espied from the window a number of newsboys hurrying down the street with some edition of a paper that was just out. He accordingly went down into the road.

He came back within a few minutes with the pages opened in his hand, and looking decidedly uncomfortable.

"What the devil is it?" asked Inkerman, and took the paper from his son. Lees drew near with his great head thrust forward, and the other read aloud the brief report of the case which had already found its way into print and publicity:

ABDUCTION CHARGE COLLAPSES
GILMOUR DISCHARGED
WITHOUT COMMENT

Robert William Gilmour, thirty-two, of 18A St. George's Square, S.W., described as of independent means, was brought up this morning at Dorchester Row Police Court, before Mr. Herrick, charged with having taken Iris Lees, under the age of eighteen, out of the charge of her friends against her will. Prisoner, a tall, well-dressed man, had been in custody since yesterday afternoon, when his arrest was effected at Inkerman Grange, Brentford. Evidence of arrest was given by Detective Inspector Few. Accused, said the inspector, made no statement at the time, except to ask

LORD INKERMEN

who, together with

THE HON. FRANCIS BRIDGES

was present at the arrest, if he would not like to employ a pair of thumb-screws for purposes of interrogation. (*Laughter.*) The case collapsed dramatically soon after it was opened. A letter found upon accused was handed up to the magistrate and read in court, causing considerable sensation. Its purport was to implore that its writer should be at once removed from the house in Childrey Street, and it contained the line:

“OF COURSE IT WAS FRANCIS.”

The letter was signed “Iris Lees.” Accused stated that he had merely acted upon the appeal contained in the letter. The girl's father agreed that the letter was in his daughter's handwriting, and having consulted with his solicitor asked, in

BRASS FACES

view of this evidence, to be allowed to withdraw the charge.

STATEMENT BY ACCUSED

Accused then entered the witness box and stated that having found the letter he went to the house indicated, and simply took the girl to Paddington Station. Later he read of the case in the papers, and went to Brentford, where he was arrested. He acted as he did out of a sense of duty, and the young lady went willingly.

Mr. Lees expressed himself satisfied with the explanation, and again asked to be allowed to withdraw the charge. The magistrate criticised certain discrepancies between the statements made in the letter and those upon which he had issued the warrant, and questioned the prosecutor. Accused was then discharged without comment. Thus ends, for the moment at least, the strange case of the Pimlico Abduction, but a good many questions are still being asked, and are likely to be. George Francis, the young chauffeur, whom it has been stated the girl was to marry, was in court, but was not called.

Lord Inkerman crushed the paper and threw it from him. Lees sunk his bearded chin on to his chest and stared out at the window. Francis Bridges adopted his father's habit of stroking his moustache, with the same effect of transparent agitation.

"You must produce that girl, Lees," Inkerman suddenly shouted at his agent, and with an eye on the green-baize silence door. "It is absolutely imperative that you can say that she has come

home, and she's got to go through with the marriage."

"Who with?" asked his son abruptly.

"Who with?" exclaimed Lord Inkerman.

Bridges got an end of his moustache between his teeth and simply gnawed it silently.

"I think it will be enough to have her home, my lord," said Lees humbly, "if she comes home and makes some satisfactory statement."

"That's not enough. You've got to throw this back in their teeth by proving that every word of the prosecution is fact—fact. It's got to be done."

It was at this moment that the door opened and Irene Goldstone ushered Gilmour into the room.

The three men stepped aside, and Francis Bridges, releasing his moustache, thrust a pair of clenched fists into his side pockets. Lord Inkerman kicked the screwed-up paper under a table and turned to the window, striking exactly the same attitude as when Gilmour had first seen him.

"Now look here——" said the Scotchman, stepping forward.

But Irene Goldstone checked him at once.

"Mr. Lees," she drawled out, "this is my office, and this matter is in my charge. You don't know this business as well as I know it, and you'll oblige me by sitting right down."

Henry Lees stared at the woman, but, whatever his first impulse, he obeyed the injunction.

Certainly the American woman knew how to command attention. She waved Gilmour to a seat and then placed herself in a large desk-chair, which she revolved until she faced the four men.

"Now, Mr. Lees," she commenced, "the object of this interview, which I promised you I would obtain, is to induce Mr. Gilmour, if we can, to state where he has placed this girl, Iris."

"Why do you think I have placed her anywhere?" Gilmour asked.

"I have one sound enough reason," answered the lady detective. "So very chivalrous a gentleman as yourself would not have abandoned a quite young girl under such circumstances. You would have taken her home and insisted on seeing her father there and then. You would never have left her alone at a London station."

"After the telephone conversation with Mr. Lees yesterday morning," said Gilmour, "I felt justified in leaving her anywhere, under any conditions whatever, rather than leaving her where she was—at Childrey Street. When I found an alleged father behaving as Mr. Lees did, I thought it time enough to proffer the help of a stranger. Afterwards I found the young lady to be of the sort who—bar being locked in a room—seem quite able to look after themselves, so why should I hesitate to leave her to her own resources? I am intensely pleased if she has not been foolish enough to go back to Brentford already."

"How glibly, then, you would trample on a home, the most sacred symbol that we have of civilization!" said Irene, with a little fire coming into her eyes, and Gilmour was convinced at once that she, at least, believed the Inkerman explanation of what had happened.

"But since," she went on, "it is only too clear that we are not dealing with a man of honour, I will confine myself strictly to business. Mr. Lees and his friends have explained everything to me with perfect frankness. That telephone conversation is easily explainable. Mr.

Lees, having made proper arrangements for his daughter's safety and security, was naturally annoyed at finding a perfect stranger interfering in a family matter, and rang off, to come at once, himself, to London, which proved that he was not as indifferent as you would pretend to this hint of something being wrong with the girl. What however, is more important, is that when we admit the telephone conversation, we are admitting to things not mentioned in the police court this morning, and can afford to be frank with one another. Now, Mr. Gilmour, Mr. Lees regrets that telephone message, and is willing to apologize, as a gentleman should, for whatsoever appeared discourteous. He wants the girl home and the matter done with."

Gilmour saw that he could not temporise with these people without admitting that he had hidden the girl, yet if he persisted in saying she left him at Paddington there was an end to the possibility of inducing Lees to behave honourably and of disposing of an alarming responsibility to himself.

He decided that the Paddington theory would have to be abandoned, and the thing fought out on subtler lines. If he could not absolutely protect Iris from this genial project of marrying her to the chauffeur, then no power on earth should make him yield her up.

"And what," he asked quietly, "does Mr. Lees' apology amount to? An apology to Miss Lees, I hope."

The Scotchman was on fire in a moment.

"I can manage my own affairs with my own daughter, thank you," he blurted out.

"Exactly," said Gilmour. "It's what I'm afraid of. I think your daughter would be better advised to manage her affairs for herself."

Lees' complexion was matching his red hair now, but Irene Goldstone lifted an authoritative hand.

"Another word from you, Mr. Lees, and I throw this case up," she exclaimed.

Lees went to his chair and sat there, slowly rubbing his hands together.

Neither Inkerman nor his son had, so far, taken any part in the conversation. The former remained with his eyes half closed and his red lips swept by the black moustache; his son stood upright, with only the flush on his face revealing any excitement.

"Mr. Lees is a little hasty," said Miss Goldstone, fixing the Scotchman with a keen eye, "but he means no discourtesy to you, Mr. Gilmour. He is in the uncomfortable position of the parent of a disobedient child, and his feelings are very excusable. Your interference was, no doubt, well meant, but you cannot do better, Mr. Gilmour, than send this young lady straight home to be dealt with by her best friends. None of us, Mr. Gilmour, can afford to play lightly like this with parental authority."

"Even adopted parental authority, I suppose," said Gilmour.

Irene looked sharply towards Lees.

"The girl is my daughter by adoption only," he said stiffly. "If she had not been, I should probably have brought her up a little less leniently and escaped all this disgrace. I should have been more the sort of father that the girl's wanted. I've been more than a father to her, and less than I should have been."

"Parentage by adoption is a very honourable relationship, Mr. Gilmour," said the little American, though clearly she was somewhat taken aback, "and the

authority is none the less, as the law will tell you."

"We had better make an end of this sentimental side of the business," said Gilmour impatiently. "I will tell you plainly that wherever Miss Lees is I am quite certain that she will not return to Brentford unless there is an absolute understanding about this marriage."

"Ha!" exclaimed Lord Inkerman, swinging round.

"I advised her to return and trust to Mr. Lees' sense of honour," went on Gilmour, "but it appears that she has not done so. It is just possible that I should be able to find her and communicate to her any offer that you may have to make, but I shall only do so if you will put it into writing, here and now, that any question of this proposed marriage is abandoned."

All three were staring at him, nonplussed by this sudden inspiration—a demand for some written contract that they dared not break.

"Her good name demands the marriage," broke in Lord Inkerman harshly.

"But Miss Lees is very sick of the gentleman," said Gilmour.

He saw Francis Bridges wince. His hands had been folded and he changed their position. Otherwise he continued motionless.

"Notice has been given to the Registrar," said Lees, a little feebly.

"For a marriage between who?" Gilmour asked mildly.

Lord Inkerman suddenly seemed to lose patience.

"Between this girl and my son's valet. I am interested in this matter, because Lees is an old and valued servant of mine. And happening as it has in

my household, I consider a slur on my confidential servant almost as a slur upon myself. I will tell you frankly that Mr. Lees, after thirty years in my service, is under discharge at the present moment, unless he sees to it that the girl clears her name."

"Really?" said Gilmour. "And are you willing to sacrifice your son into the bargain?"

"What the devil do you mean, sir?" exclaimed Lord Inkerman, springing up.

Francis Bridges had also come a step nearer.

"I mean that if it is true that the girl cannot very well whitewash your names except by marrying somebody, are you seriously going to make a sacrifice of the gentleman here by asking him to stand down for his chauffeur?"

"You are a madman or a blackmailer," roared out Lord Inkerman. Bridges himself was in transparent confusion.

"She may prefer the chauffeur, of course," went on Gilmour. "I think if she had to make a choice she would, but really I don't think she wants either."

The situation was beyond even the dictatorship of Irene Goldstone. Bridges appeared as if at last about to show some fight, and Lees was agitatedly interposing himself between his master and Gilmour, who had taken up his hat, and stood smilingly facing them at the door.

Miss Goldstone clapped her hands together and obtained some order.

"There is no use or need for this pandemonium," she exclaimed. "All there is need for is a plain understanding. Mr. Gilmour, the moment you return to that girl I warn you that you will be arrested again, and on a serious charge that you will have very little

chance of escaping from after your evidence in the police court this morning. You're a little bit too clever, and you'll slip up sharp before you're much older."

"You're not satisfied, then, that bluff's no good," said Gilmour quietly. "I'm only amazed, Miss Goldstone, to find a woman involved in a conspiracy like this against one of her own sisters."

Irene Goldstone looked towards the three men back in the room, and then she spoke in a declamatory manner.

"Mr. Gilmour," she exclaimed, "I have heard what you have had to say, I gather the full meaning of the suggestion you make, and I refute it utterly. My work is a mission to me, and I am a woman of principle. I say I refute your scandalous imputation. There are certain beliefs that the rock of my faith is built upon. One is a respect for the authority of the home; the other is a respect for that wonderful tradition, your fine old English aristocracy, your good old English names. You've roused the warcry to me, you've rattled your tocsin, and I'm going to fight this thing right out!"

Gilmour still smiled.

"You'll feel sick some day, Miss Goldstone," he said, with his hand on the door knob. "But I'm glad to know you're fighting for your principles."

The little woman looked at him grimly.

"Remember the warning I've given you, Mr. Gilmour," she said. "Just go to Iris Lees, and I'll be close behind you."

Gilmour smiled again, bowed, and went from the room, closing the series of doors behind him. Then he started to run down the stairs.

Irene Goldstone turned to the telephone at her desk and spoke into it, with her authoritative finger held aloft.

"Say, down there," she drawled out, "don't lose sight of the gentleman who's going down the steps."

CHAPTER IX

The Second Day. Gilmour feels unnerved and goes to a Picture Theatre—A substantial Shadow—Refuge at last—A Telephone Caller and a fresh Interview—Good for the Taxi-man.

GILMOUR had made off quickly down the stairs. He had had one galling enough experience of Irene's tenacity.

But already a girl clerk was calmly taking the chief's message in the office on the second floor, and, hanging up the receiver again, she turned like an automaton to two women who were sitting, hatted and gloved, at a couch under the wall.

"You're not to lose sight of the gentleman who's just going down the stairs," she said expressionlessly, and the two women rose like one and quitted the room.

They were apparently elderly spinster sisters, with that appearance suggestive of the distribution of religious tracts.

Gilmour, when he had reached the pavement, took a look back, and saw the two women stepping from the doorway, but their manner and carriage disarmed the smallest suspicion as to their intentions. Besides, they had opened a door and emerged on to the staircase simultaneously with himself, two floors below where he had left Irene but an instant before.

He walked on towards Holborn and then made his way round the Birkbeck Buildings. It was here, in a narrow courtyard, that he looked back again, to find that the ladies were taking precisely the same direction. He turned off at once, and made his way to the little old-world garden that lies behind Holborn. The ladies did the same thing, and Gilmour sat down on a public seat under a spreading plane-tree. The ladies, in the most innocent manner possible, found a subject of interest at the furthest end of the same garden.

The idea of being shadowed is so disturbing a one that it has its place in the list of common hallucinations. Gilmour disliked the idea of being the victim of a delusion, but this insistent dogging of his footsteps was beginning to unnerve him. He walked on again, and, returning to Holborn, went into a so-styled "Picture Theatre" to see what would happen.

This step was a highly disconcerting one to the two ladies; the conditions of "Picture Theatres" not being favourable to the art of espionage. They consulted outside for a few moments; then one went in and the other remained to watch the exits.

Gilmour had asked for the seat nearest the entrance, thinking it possible that the ladies would come in and pass to the body of the auditorium. A film was in progress showing a postman in a pillar-box being rolled down a water-chute; a giant, flickering monochrome of this disaster. Just as the postman hit the water, the lady who had essayed to enter also sought a seat near the door, and having just come out of the sunlight she sat on Gilmour's lap.

"Now, hang it all!" he exclaimed, "if this isn't too much!"

The lady was thrown off her guard, and momentarily came up against the instincts of a woman. She muttered a confused apology and fell over several other people in her hurried retreat from the spot, while Gilmour went out of the building.

This was merely an interlude, however, and quite a hopeless one, for the lady came out of the theatre too, and he was hardly in the street again before they were both in the neighbourhood of his heels.

He knew that there was no train for Ayot St. Lawrence for some hours, and as it seemed immaterial what he did, he decided to go to his flat and at least find temporary peace there. He hailed a cab and directed the driver to St. George's Square, regardless of whether the women shadowed him there or not.

It was a little after two o'clock when he unlocked the door of his flat. Already, in passing another tenant on the stairs, he had been made to realise that his police-court appearance, in spite of the fact that he had been discharged, had let him down very considerably in other people's eyes. Now he entered his rooms, and the first thing that he found there was a notice to quit. There had been a police visit to his rooms that morning, and he was no longer a desirable tenant.

Gilmour threw this intimation into the nearest fireplace and beheld everywhere evidence of the police visit. The papers from his private desk were scattered on a table, and every item of furniture or ornament appeared disarranged. He was a tidy liver, however, and it had been a comparatively simple thing to search the rooms through. His one matter for congratulation was that, in taking with him the key to the

Hertfordshire cottage, he had removed the only evidence which existed as to that secret.

Turning to the window, he looked out, and saw a cab waiting, with two black hats in it, at the end of the street.

He had hardly yet got used to the fantastic series of incidents that had brought him to this pass, but the question of how he should get to Iris was still undecided, and he threw himself along the couch in his smoking-room.

At least no one could disturb him there.

He had, however, forgotten the telephone bell which rang out suddenly, and the sound came as a shock, for he was staring at the instrument at the moment.

He crossed the room and took down the receiver.

"Hullo—is that you, Gilmour?" said a man's voice.

"Hullo, Filmer," answered Gilmour. "You back in town?"

"I ran up over your business, old chap. I thought you might want some friend," answered the voice. "I missed you at Dorchester Row, and I've been round to your flat twice. Glad it's all right."

"Now, why the deuce didn't I think of Lloyd Filmer?" Gilmour was muttering to himself.

"I'm glad you've rung up, old chap," he called. "You're just who I wanted. I'm afraid things aren't quite all right, and you can help me."

"All right, Gilmour," sang back the voice. "I'm only speaking from the Stores. I'll nip into a cab and be round with you in five minutes."

"Hold on," called Gilmour. "I don't want you to come round. I want a talk with you. Are you in a private place there?"

"Yes. I'm in a box. What's up?"

"Have you read my defence this morning?"

"Of course I have. Bravo, old man."

"Well, it was all lies. I know where the girl is."

"Phew!" went the receiver at Gilmour's ear.

Gilmour had abruptly realised that there was quite another way out of his difficulty, and without any deliberation was acting upon it.

"I've got a couple of detectives shadowing me outside the house here now. You see, the other party have got wind of it. You mustn't come round. But you can help me tremendously if you're willing to."

"Certainly," came back the voice, though, Gilmour thought, with the faintest shade of hesitation.

"Don't mistake me, Filmer. The evidence wasn't entirely lies. I knew nothing of the girl before I went there, and I only went because of the letter, but she's in a big mess and I've got to get her out of it."

"Yes?"

"You read about the chauffeur Francis she was supposed to have eloped with, and going to be married to?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, that's lies on the other side. The man who took her from the school at Eastbourne was Lord Inkerman's son, the Honourable Francis Bridges. Same name—Francis—you see."

"Yes, I see that, old chap. I'm beginning to understand."

"The family are trying to hush the scandal up by getting her to marry the chauffeur, and so confirm their story, but she naturally objects. It's what'll happen

to her if they get her home though. She's very young and timid and all that—she wouldn't have a chance, and I've put her somewhere—do you understand?"

"It's a bit risky, after what you said in court, isn't it?"

"It's worth the risk, surely, but don't you have anything to do with it unless you want to."

There was a pause of some moments, and then the voice spoke again.

"What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to go to the place where I've put her, and tell her she'll have to stay there alone for some days, till I can get to her. Tell her she's not to be afraid, and I'll get to her as soon as I can. You'll have to tell her everything that happened at the police court, in fact, so that she properly realises her position. You must explain that I'm being followed and I daren't risk coming to her for the moment."

"Is it the sort of place I could get to without being observed myself then?" the other asked. "I don't mean that I funk it, but I'd like to know. I've got a wife, and she'd never understand."

"It's in the country—thirty miles out of London. A cottage rent down there. It's absolutely safe for you."

"All right, old man. I'll do it at once. Give me all the particulars." The words came over the line very slowly.

Gilmour more than once during the conversation had felt some hesitation himself. He had not altogether liked Filmer's faltering voice, but, after all, he told himself, it was only reasonable.

The fact of the man ringing him up, and his own first impression in his favour, had rather precipitated him

into this confidence, and Filmer was, after all, the one man he would care to trust.

His friendship with Lloyd Filmer had existed for several years, and probably he knew him as intimately as anybody did. He was a curious young man who had made a considerable reputation in photographic portraiture. He dressed strangely and talked generally of art. Gilmour had sat to him once, by invitation, and had received an invoice for ten guineas, some months before the arrival of the first proofs. It was a barely decipherable invoice with the figures standing almost on their heads in a corner.

Gilmour stood at the telephone and for a moment hesitated, visualising Filmer. He saw an abnormally tall figure, a little stooping, pale yellow hair, and a pallid, clean-shaven face with the mouth of an athlete and the eye of a lawyer. It was a strange head that Lloyd Filmer had, with its odd mixture of worldliness and the poet's temperament. He vaguely remembered something about an unpleasant first impression, but, as a recollection, it was quite indistinct.

"Hullo, Gilmour," the voice was saying, "I'm waiting here."

Gilmour put his vague scruples aside, and spoke into the instrument.

He reserved nothing of the story; it was useless to but when he mentioned his cottage, and explained his reasons for liking to be "Mr Jones" sometimes, he fancied that he noticed a touch of decided scepticism in the other's voice as he answered:

"I see, exactly."

It was arranged that Filmer should leave for Ayot at once. He was to assure the girl that he, Gilmour, would get to her the next day, somehow; and that then

he would make arrangements for her absolute safety somewhere.

"Are you all right for money?" Gilmour asked finally. "I should like you to take some provisions. I'll post a cheque to cover everything to-night to your studio."

Lloyd Filmer's voice came back, curiously hesitating.

"I say, old chap, that's all right, of course," spoke the receiver. "I've got a few pounds on me, but as a matter of fact I'm in some hole about money and I was going to ask you about that—if you could help me."

"Is it much?" asked Gilmour.

Lloyd Filmer was actually speaking nervously.

"I'm afraid it is," he answered; "but we needn't go into that now."

"I'll risk meeting you at my club to-night then," said Gilmour. "I ought to be safe enough there. If they know I'm in the place they can hardly know who comes in to see me. I ought perhaps to have thought of that."

The truth was that now Gilmour had revealed his secret he regretted it. He leapt at the opportunity of bringing the man back to London immediately, as much for this reason as for his anxiety to know the result of the interview.

He reached out, from where he stood, for a time-table, and quickly looked up the station.

"I say," he called out, "there's a train back at nine-thirty. It gets to King's Cross at ten-twenty-five. You can do that easily. Will you call at the Wells Club in Sackville Street at a quarter to eleven?"

"All right," answered Filmer. "I'll be there. And if that's all now, I'll say good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Gilmour, "and a thousand thanks."

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He heard the bell ring off and turned back to the window. The taxi-cab was still waiting at the end of the street.

"Good for the taxi-man," soliloquised Gilmour, and took a book to the couch.

CHAPTER X

The Second Day. Lloyd Filmer reflects on Mr. Jones—Iris reflects on Mr. Gilmour—Night and a tireless Owl—Daytime and Mr. Filmer—Filmer is impressed and Iris goes back to a Photograph.

FILMER hung up the receiver in the box at the Army and Navy Stores, and walked slowly out of the building.

Gilmour's request had considerably surprised him. He knew Gilmour well, but judging human nature by his own, he felt confident that there was more in the matter than had been revealed to him.

To begin with, nothing could sound more absurd than Gilmour's explanation of that country cottage rented as "Mr. Jones." He had certainly always thought of Gilmour as a singularly "straight man," with few secret pages in his life's book, yet those were the sort of men, after all, who had most.

Anyway, it was a piece of sheer luck, Gilmour putting himself under such an obligation, just at the moment when he had been thinking of talking to him about business on his own account.

As for the commission, he would carry it through punctually. He felt no particular curiosity about this mysterious lady of Gilmour's, but it should prove useful, very useful.

He also reflected that it was a good thing he had an excuse, now, to be in London for the night. Filmer

lived at Hazelmere and could not get the last train back now. He would wire and tell his wife that he was staying with Gilmour.

Meanwhile, thirty miles away, in the cottage on the heath, Iris Lees was awaiting news.

If Gilmour could but have watched her after he had left on the previous afternoon, he would probably have been well satisfied with all that there was to see. Iris alone appeared a very different person from Iris in company, ordinarily, but she was not less charming. A certain abandonment marked her conduct almost as soon as she was alone, for when Gilmour strode away across the heath she remained silently looking after him for only a very few minutes.

Perhaps the truth was that this very unconventional meeting had had a strange effect upon her. She had certainly had no opportunity of looking into the matter. While Gilmour was with her, her deportment had been circumspect; when he went she watched him, but before his tall form had merged into the landscape and disappeared she had turned back into the room and drawn in a deep breath.

She went back to the settee in the sitting-room and threw herself on to it, clenching, as one might say, her eyelids, and abandoning herself to a posture of ecstatic rest.

Then—quite alone in the cottage—she actually blushed. She sprang up and became alert, with her face burning. There was no question, however, of the mood which her thoughts had left her in. She commenced to sing.

She found a broom and, prompted by that primeval instinct which is liable to awakenment in all of us, tidied up the house. It was an elaborate tidy, including

sweeping up minute "bits," and when this was all done she ran suddenly into the garden. All the time her feelings were obviously in a sort of pent-up condition, for now she raced about the lawn, only pausing to let down her hair.

It was that part of the garden at the back of the house. The box hedge was as stout as a city wall, and the place as secret as such a hedge could make it. Presently these feelings toned down, by an easy gradation, to a sedentary, but none the less intense, form. She went demurely into the house again and searched for something of Gilmour's. She found a photograph and looked at it for a long time, very curiously.

This was precisely at the moment when Gilmour was being shown into his cell at Dorchester Row. He would have been well recompensed for the sensations he was enduring could he but have gazed into the cottage. It would have been a picture to excite delirium—Iris bending over the table, a mass of auburn hair falling about her shoulders and her eyes gazing fixedly upon his own portrait.

She did not forget to eat, however, and presently she consumed biscuits with the photograph propped up in front of her.

While the daylight lasted these conditions appeared satisfactory, but presently the light from the window waned and she went up to the attic bedroom, as if to forestall the darkness.

For a long time she remained at the open window—shielded from the world outside by large trees—and the night inexorably fell. Gilmour was already sleeping in his glazed cell, but Iris remained awake and in considerable alarm. That matters might not be im-

proved, an owl came to the nearest tree and hooted tirelessly. But she slept in the end and awoke to find the sun slanting into the room, and the memories of the night quite unreal.

Nevertheless when it had gone well into mid-day and there was no more sign from Gilmour than as if he had departed for all time, her manner changed again. She nibbled biscuits and laid them down half eaten, and at three o'clock she consulted the photograph again. It was quite clear from the eyes and the curve of the mouth that Gilmour undertook things at least in earnest. The argument consequently was that something had happened. It was equally deducible from the data at her command that she could do nothing. For one thing, she was not possessed of a penny piece. She went on looking at the photograph, but it was no longer a satisfactory occupation. She was annoyed at being left in such abysmal darkness as to what was happening. To sport in the garden was equally impossible, and, not being of a tearful disposition, she found a book and commenced, doggedly, to read.

In this way she passed the afternoon, the book and the photograph propped on the table and a view of the clock on the mantelshelf presenting itself precisely between the two, so that she might alternate her attention between them.

When the clock said a quarter to six Filmer was making his way across the fields towards her. The journey down to the little station had been monotonous enough, but he was glad to be by himself.

Though so near London it was a lonely part of the country, and he reached the stretch of heather, just then in full bloom, without having passed a soul since he had left the last village behind him.

He picked a gay sprig and put it in his coat, passing on to the cottage with a new air. Filmer had not thought much of its occupant until now, but a change always came over him as he approached women. His mental tone shifted always to another key, a process to which he cheerfully surrendered himself.

Being the only landmark near the heath, the cottage was easy to locate, and he walked through the seeding summer grass towards it, agreeing to himself that it was decidedly what one might term an "unprotected" place for a girl to be left alone in.

He found the wicket gate in the box hedge and passed through to the door under the porch.

There was no knocker, and he rattled on the woodwork with his knuckles.

Iris heard the first knock at a moment when she was permitting herself to indignantly address the photograph. The spuriousness of her annoyance was made clear when she sprang up with her face red and smiling. She picked up the portrait and slipped it into a table drawer. Then she paused for a moment before a little mirror on the wall and arranged her hair with a steady command of nerve, shaking out what seemed a favourite lock, so that it hung by one of her small ears. Finally she tripped through to the hall.

The door was bolted, but she drew back the fastenings and turned the handle eagerly, for the tapping on the panels had had an air of familiar understanding about it which had entirely disarmed any doubt that it might not be Gilmour. It had been a friendly beckoning rather than a stranger's summons.

Filmer stood in the porchway, lifting his hat.

Iris drew back, disappointed and startled.

"Mr. Gilmour has asked me to call, Miss Lees," he

said, with a reassuring easiness. "He hasn't been able to get back to you himself, for reasons which I am to explain. After that I'm going to dash off and leave you."

"Oh," said Iris, at a complete loss to add anything to the ejaculation.

"Perhaps you would rather talk to me in the garden," said Filmer, "or shall we talk here at the door, or shall I come in? Here's a parcel of provisions for one thing."

He was already saying to himself, in something like amazement, that Gilmour was certainly hiding one of the prettiest living women he had ever come across—even with all his photographic experience of pretty women.

His manner was very quiet, and entirely unassuming. He spoke more with hesitation than any assertiveness, and Iris felt her nervousness at the sight of a stranger rapidly disappearing. After over twenty-four hours of utter loneliness, the sight of anyone ostensibly friendly was an almost intoxicating relief; the tall man with the soft speech had not entirely put her at her ease, but he had made active mistrust impossible.

"I'm so tired of being indoors," she said quickly. "If you will walk in the garden and talk to me. I suppose you know why I am here, and that I don't wish anyone to see me."

"Gilmour has made a confidant of me in the whole business," said Filmer. "He was obliged to, as I will explain to you. He's afraid it will be rather a shock, but he assures you that everything will come out all right if you will do exactly as he tells you."

"Yes," said Iris, "I will do what he tells me."

Filmer fulfilled his instructions without alteration

or adornment, but all the time he was repeating to himself that the girl was an amazing beauty, and that it was a piece of luck to have been thrown in her way, merely to look at her. He still assured himself that he was "fed up" with women, and that just now, at least, the prettiest of them could not very seriously interest him; still, it was always a kind of salve to see a really beautiful one.

He spoke very kindly, and Iris accepted her instructions with less disappointment than she felt. Gilmour was free and would soon get down to her; she centred her interest on that assurance, and promised that she would not move out of the house.

Filmer finished his business and turned to say "Good-bye."

"You're not too lonely here, I hope," he said sympathetically.

"It's rather dreadful," confessed Iris, "but perhaps now that I know, I shan't feel it so much. It's the nights, but they've got to pass, and then I feel all right again in the morning."

Filmer hesitated.

"I suppose," he said, "that if Gilmour by any chance can't get down, say for three or four days—something stops him—you wouldn't care for me to run down and give you a visit—just a chat like this?"

"I'd rather you didn't trouble," she said quickly. "It would be a long way."

"It would be a pleasure," exclaimed Filmer, with some eagerness. "I daresay Gilmour would think it unnecessary, but I need hardly ask him anything about it."

"Oh no, please," said Iris unmistakably. "I wouldn't think of troubling you."

"All right." Filmer smiled and held out his hand. "Good-bye. But you've got a friend in me, if ever you want one. I've told you my name, and just 'Filmer, Hazelmere Post Office, to be called for,' would always find me. Good-bye again."

He was gone, leaving her watching his retreating figure, as she had watched Gilmour's the day before.

But it was with very different feelings. Gilmour had dispelled a sense of danger ; this man had somehow manufactured one. She went in and bolted the door again, going at once to Gilmour's photograph and placing it on the table. She leaned over it with her elbows on the wood and her face in her hands, regarding it fixedly for a long time.

CHAPTER XI

The Second Day. Filmer proposes an Exchange of Obligations—
Mrs. Filmer introduces herself—Heather and *The Hatfield Times*—A "Suffragette" who gave away Circulars.

LLOYD FILMER made his way back to Ayot station with his mind running wholly upon Iris Lees, but he resisted that train of thought because he had other, and decidedly serious, things to think of. On the station platform he bought a local paper and tried to settle his brain by a quiet reading of its, to him, entirely uninteresting contents.

He had some twenty minutes to wait, and sitting in the empty waiting-room he was annoyed to find himself making sketches of the girl's face on the margin of the paper, and scribbling her name in a variety of ways. At last he thrust the journal away into his coat pocket, and after that strode up and down the platform. He had this interview with Gilmour to think about, and he forced his mind to the consideration of that matter. There was a delicate subject to be broached under very opportune circumstances; hot iron to be struck.

Filmer thought to himself how different the interview would have been if he had had to seek it with no pull over Gilmour; a mere begging interview, asking for the loan of money. He knew Gilmour to be an amiable enough man, and a more than average friend, but his experience was that there was never any telling

what unwelcome trait of character one would come up against when money borrowing was the object.

Yet, just now, Gilmour could not very well refuse him.

Earlier in the morning, when he had read of the Pimlico Abduction Case in the papers, and of Gilmour's surprising part in it, he had hurried to London hoping to be able to make himself of some use, and Fate had worked handsomely in his favour.

Filmer hardly thought of himself as a scoundrel for all this. The truth was that he wanted money, quickly and badly, and the artistic side of his temperament was operating as it generally does in such cases. There was a real distaste for the humiliation of such a need, which reacted towards a blunting of the very sensitiveness which he was supposed to feel towards the beautiful. A more worldly man would have sacrificed no jot of personal esteem; Filmer argued that he would stoop to anything if he had to stoop at all.

The unfortunate part of the business was why he wanted the money, but now he would exchange secrets with Gilmour. He held the latter's, and the latter should hold his.

He reached King's Cross to time, and took a taxicab at once to Sackville Street.

Gilmour had already reached the club.

The afternoon and the evening at the flat he had spent quietly, reflecting with some satisfaction on the vigil of those who had been set to watch him.

He would have liked to have seen the papers, for he had not yet had any opportunity of reading the reports of the case, but he preferred not to break the monotony of the business of shadowing him by a little jaunt in his wake to the newspaper shop and back. He was

not impatient, and he read quietly for the greater part of the time.

At half-past ten he telephoned to the cab-rank for a taxi, giving his destination over the 'phone, so that he merely had to jump into the vehicle, and as they pulled off he saw the lights of a second cab glide out from the end of the square and commence a silent pursuit.

"Let them enjoy themselves to-night," he muttered

At the club he passed through into the smoking-room, leaving instructions that Filmer was to be brought to him immediately upon his arrival. There were five minutes to spare, and he seized at once upon a newspaper. He knew that at this time of the year he was very sure to find the club empty, or nearly so, and he chose a lonely corner in the great room.

He was glad to see no familiar faces, for he had had his misgivings as to how he might be received. The club servants had gazed after his retreating figure, but they would not have revealed any direct interest in a ten-foot giant.

The paper which he had chanced upon was a late edition of the one that Francis Bridges had bought in Chancery Lane that morning, but the brief comment which had then been ventured upon was abandoned. It had been the rash work of a young reporter, and had passed a sub-editor prior to the arrival of the editor himself at the newspaper offices. Then it had disappeared. It had lived long enough, however, to have done its work in the breast of Lord Inkerman, at least.

Gilmour ran through the report of the case, but it was very literal, and not particularly entertaining. He threw the paper from him as he saw Filmer being ushered into the room.

First of all, Filmer was hungry, and he asked for a brandy and soda and biscuits before he began his narrative. When he entered into a detailed account of his visit to the cottage, there was no reference in it to the personal interest which Iris Lees had stirred in him.

Gilmour himself asked no questions about the girl or her demeanour. By now he resented intensely the circumstances that had obliged him to accept this man's help. Face to face with Filmer, he was compelled to recognise that he had chosen an anything but satisfactory ally.

Usually when he had met him he had found him pale and morose, but to-night Filmer was flushed, and showed, obviously enough, some sort of suppressed excitement. Gilmour found himself feeling decidedly alarmed.

He repaid the money that had been spent on the errand, and finding the other growing momentarily more uncomfortable, he asked what this other matter was that he wished to speak to him about.

Filmer quite coolly opened the business.

"The fact is," he said, "that I want money, Gilmour, and what may sound rather a large sum."

"I'm sorry," said Gilmour, "very sorry. But it's more than I've got myself—any large sum of money."

"You will let me explain it, anyway?"

"I'd help you if I could," said Gilmour. "Of course you may tell me. I told you of my trouble and you were able to help me, and did. I needn't say that if I can do anything I will."

Filmer, who was smoking, looked at him through half-closed eyes, and turned his cigar between his lips.

"I'll explain all there is to explain," he said quietly "I don't want it all at once. If I had a little now I should be all right, but it will take me some while to pay it back—I'm being perfectly candid with you."

"My dear Filmer," Gilmour exclaimed, "don't ask me for the Tate Gallery, or anything else that I don't possess."

Filmer waited, still with his eyes half closed, his arms folded and his back reclining in the leathern upholstery.

"You'll let me explain, anyway, old man," he said with his voice showing the same dogged tenacity of purpose as his expression.

"If you wish to," said Gilmour. "I'm gently hinting at my own position."

"Certainly," nodded Filmer. "And I want to gently hint at mine—a little exchange of confidences, old man, if it's nothing more than that."

Gilmour, not enjoying the look on the other's face, felt a wave of resentment, but he suppressed it successfully and managed to meet his guest's eye with a look of amiable sympathy.

"All right, Filmer," he said. "Tell me anything you like."

"Well, the truth is," said the other, "that I've been rather a fool in a certain matter." His tone implied that so had Gilmour, too.

"Unfortunately," he went on, "there's a lady in my business also, and unfortunately again, I am a married man. You mustn't jump at the conclusion that there's anything in it—there doesn't happen to be, any more than there is in your little affair, but, as I say, I have a wife."

The menacing note was too apparent for Gilmour to

escape seeing it, and it looked as if it were meant to be.

"It's more of an ordinary affair in my case," Filmer went on. "About six months ago I met a certain lady—she sat to me, as a matter of fact—and I was being very bored at home just then, and I behaved rather indiscreetly, as far as appearances are concerned, which is a thing we are all apt to do at times. To be quite candid, the lady is a married lady, and we had various illicit but perfectly innocent lunches, et cetera, up town.

"Well, what has happened is that this has come to the ears of the husband, a fool, of course, as all married men are, unfortunately, and his solicitors have been to see me. They ingeniously put it that an offer on my part of a little cash would prevent the matter going farther. You see the irritating thing is that the lady has no social position, and I have. I can't afford to let it go into court—they're a pack of nobodies, you understand—"

"But if it's been a mere harmless lunch or two—" broke in Gilmour.

Filmer shook his head.

"You don't know my wife, old man," he said blandly. "I've got to pay up or be finished; there's no question about that."

"But, my dear chap," expostulated Gilmour, "there's all the question in the world. Any man might be liable to be cited a co-respondent in a divorce case by a jealous husband; there's nothing in it without absolute evidence. Your wife would probably be the last person in the world to wish you to funk it. Your wife's the right person to go to."

Filmer laughed aloud, altering his position on the

sofa with a swing of his legs, and then leaning forward until his face was close to Gilmour's.

"Go to my wife!" he exclaimed. "She'd throttle me on the spot, Gilmour. I will be candid. Do you know that we haven't a woman servant in our house because of the insane brain-storm that sweeps over her if she so much as sees me in the same room as a woman. I have to hide all my prints and negatives of lady_sitters, and make out that I only take the portraits of men. I always take a woman at her own house—never in my studio, unless it's a child or else somebody well past fifty, and then my wife's there to chaperon me. My dear Gilmour, you don't know to what lengths the jealousy of a really green-eyed woman will carry her, and I tell you I am faced with complete ruin if this thing goes one inch farther. Go to my wife, Gilmour! You don't know what you're talking about!"

It was at this moment that a page-boy entered the room and approached them.

"There's a lady outside in a cab, sir," he said to Gilmour. "She wishes to see Mr. Filmer, sir, very particularly."

Filmer coloured up over his high forehead.

"Did she give her name?" he asked.

"Mrs. Filmer, sir," answered the page-boy.

Filmer sprang up nervously.

"Why the devil did you say I was here, without seeing me first?" he exclaimed.

"The lady asked for Mr. Gilmour, sir," said the page-boy, "and the hall-porter said you were in the club. Then the lady said her husband would be with him as she had had a telegram that you were together. I didn't know what to say, sir."

"Oh, it's all right, I suppose," said Filmer, with irritation. "You'd better come out with me, Gilmour."

"All right." Gilmour got up with some relief.

Filmer turned to the boy.

"Say I'll be there in a moment," he told him.

When they were alone he turned to his companion.

"You might say I was staying at your place to-night, old man," he said nervously. "I wired that I was. Come out, and you'll see that it's right, what I've been telling you. And get me off somehow, if she wants to take me anywhere else. Besides, we haven't finished our conversation."

Gilmour had been congratulating himself upon the interruption, but an ugly look was back in Filmer's face when he spoke the last words. Then he walked off towards the door, with Gilmour following.

Under the facade of the club, in the glare of an arc lamp, a yellow taxi-cab was drawn up, with a face, that even in the incandescent light looked peculiarly plump and pink and pretty, peering from the open window towards the doorway.

The two men came out hatless, and Filmer, whose manner had become exaggeratedly courteous, took Gilmour by the sleeve and led him to the cab.

"Hullo, Lilian," he called out; "nothing wrong, I hope?"

Gilmour could see the face clearly now, and found it quite young and obviously desperately unhappy. It suggested puzzling combinations of character. Her manner, particularly in her show of affection towards Filmer, would have seemed unduly familiar in front of a stranger, but that her voice was querulous and revealed some shame at the transparent curiosity

in her husband's doings. She was a little woman, apparently, and as she was distressed enough to look "helpless," Gilmour was sorry for her.

"A little business brought me to town this evening, Lloyd," she explained to her husband, with a faint smile on her small and full mouth, and her eyes traveling sideways towards Gilmour. "I'm staying at the Metropole, as usual, and I thought I would pick you up, if you had had your chat."

"Let me introduce Mr. Gilmour," said Filmer hurriedly.

Mrs. Filmer shook hands out of the cab window.

"I won't pretend I haven't read of your adventures," she said, never altering the slight, fixed-looking smile of her lips. "I guessed there was something when Lloyd rushed up to town without telling me of his plans. I do not usually see the newspapers, but I knew that he had been excited about something that he had read, so I studied the morning paper. I congratulate you upon your lucky escape."

"But it was only right," said Filmer.

His wife looked at him.

"Is that heather in your coat?" she asked abruptly.

Filmer actually stammered, and obviously felt about for a reply. It was the unlucky spray that he had picked on the heath near Gilmour's cottage, before his interview with Iris.

"Oh, I gave it him," said Gilmour quickly. "I had some sent me from the country."

Mrs. Filmer smiled again, and toyed with the lapels of her husband's coat.

"Fetch your hat, boy," she said to him.

Gilmour bowed to Mrs. Filmer and turned with his companion to go; at the same moment a white-gloved

hand stretched forth out of the cab window and took a newspaper from Filmer's overcoat pocket.

"Something for me to read, dear," she explained, with another smile towards Gilmour.

They went into the building, and Filmer, clutching his friend's arm, pulled him aside.

"A miserably unfortunate thing," he exclaimed, "but do you know what she's done? She's taken a *Hatfield Times* that I bought this afternoon out of my confounded pocket; and in the train I did an absurd thing. I scribbled over it. I wrote the name, 'Iris Lees,' and even scribbled her face. She'll not rest now till she's got to the bottom of it."

Gilmour looked at the other, with a wave of rage surging up in him.

What right had Filmer to draw Iris's face and to write her name over the pages of a newspaper, and why had he done it? Was it out of infatuation? Filmer's voice appeared quite clearly to betray what had been his feelings.

It was surprising to Gilmour, this swirl of impotent anger that had arisen like a tempest within him, and he forced it back, trying to centre his mind on the actual danger of the incident. It was no real clue to the cottage, but there was danger in it with such a woman; that was obvious. What was a complete secret that morning was already shared with Filmer, and now it was leaking out even beyond him.

"You must get into the cab at once," he said, "and get the paper from her."

"If we can we will," said Filmer, "but my wife is a very tenacious lady. It's certainly unfortunate, though; for *The Hatfield Times* and my sprig of heather fit pretty well together."

"It's your drawing the girl's face on the paper, and her name!" exclaimed Gilmour. "That's the madness."

"Well, there is one explanation," said Filmer, "if we can't get hold of the paper. We picked it up in the club here accidentally, remember, and I made the drawings to your description while we were talking of the case. It's thin, but it'll just hold water."

Gilmour had mastered himself enough to make at least a civil acquiescence, and the two returned to the street.

It was on the club steps that Gilmour uttered a smothered exclamation of sheer disgust.

"What's the matter?" asked Filmer.

"That woman, talking at the cab there," answered Gilmour, stepping back.

"That's nothing," laughed Filmer. "It's a suffragette giving away circulars. She spoke to me when I came in."

"It's Irene Goldstone, the woman who's been shadowing me," said Gilmour.

Irene was nodding her head at the cab window, and now she turned a swift glance towards Gilmour. The next instant she was gone.

CHAPTER XII

The Second Day. The Kerbstone Interview continued—
Mrs. Filmer says "Certainly not" to a Suffragette—
And then makes an Appointment—Two frank Women.

IRENE GOLDSTONE was appropriately named, by those who knew her, "Irene Touchstone." Her luck was proverbial, only it was not luck. She was possessed of keenness as some people might be possessed of the devil. It was a mania in an otherwise sane enough personality. Nothing could escape this brain of hers, that knew no rest, and now she had taken up the Lees case—or the Inkerman case, as she preferred to call it—to win.

She had told Gilmour in her office that he had "roused the war-cry to her," and that she would fight him to a finish. And she had confessed also to those two profoundly felt tenets of hers—a respect for the home; a belief in "the good old English name." She would have despised a mean and undeserving family circle, or a name that had once been publicly dishonoured, but her prejudice was to accept all homes and superior names as being in the nature of things stainless. In dealing with such a lineage as that possessed by Lord Inkerman her prejudice became an iron-bound conviction.

When Gilmour had left the office, she had switched on, as it were, the two women investigators merely

to keep in sight of him. As soon as she had dismissed her clients she had prepared to get into personal touch with the case again.

Fortunately she could not hear Inkerman's comment in the motor, on the way back to Brentford.

"Rather a little fool, that," he had remarked, "but a clever little fool, and likely to be very useful."

"I'd not have liked her against us," Henry Lees had answered. "The only awkward thing is that she hasn't got all the facts of the case. If she had she might prove dangerous."

Inkerman had turned on him, and literally showed his teeth.

"The best thing you can do, Lees," he had said, "is to get it into your head that she has got every fact of the case. You'd better believe in the facts yourself, if you want to see yourself out of this trouble." And Lees had muttered that, of course, the facts were correct enough.

Meanwhile Irene Goldstone was picking up the dropped thread.

Soon after the two women had followed Gilmour to his flat in Pimlico, one of them had 'phoned through to the office a brief report of their doings and Irene herself had sped to the scene in a cab.

She knew well enough the telephone opportunities of Gilmour within the privacy of his rooms, but she was obliged to chafe outside until his appointment took him on to the club in Sackville Street.

That he was keeping an appointment there was pretty obvious, but the difficulty was going to be discovering who—among all the callers at the club—he was keeping it with.

Where she could do nothing, Irene Goldstone was not one to allow her equanimity to be disturbed. She could play a waiting game as well as a feverishly mobile one.

The particular step that she had taken to ensure an unmolested position outside the club was simple enough. It was one that she had often found useful. Wearing the badge of the "Woman's Suffrage League," of which she was an actual member, not entirely for business reasons, she had appeared on the scene with a batch of pamphlets, which it was her care to be in a position to distribute.

By this means she had seen every man who entered the club, and retained a vivid memory of each. Presently it was very certain that Gilmour would emerge, quite possibly with a companion, though in case of emergencies another member of her staff was waiting at the service door at the rear of the building. Fortunately it was not a residential club, and there was no fear of her quarry spending the night there.

She had waited a full hour when Mrs. Filmer's cab drew up, and as the hall-porter held his conversation with her from the kerbstone she was at once made aware that she had picked up the scent. She learned from the conversation that Filmer had wired that he was with Gilmour, and that it was this man Filmer whom Gilmour was apparently meeting in the club. It was one of her "lucky" strokes.

She kept well in the background when Filmer and Gilmour came out of the building and held their parley at the cab door, but she was near enough to follow all that was happening, and, because of Mrs. Filmer's position, to hear most of the conversation.

She saw the heather incident, and noted at once the husband's confusion, and Gilmour's intervention. She saw the taking of the newspaper out of Filmer's coat, though at the moment she attached no particular significance to it, and when the two men went back into the club, and the cab still waited, she walked up to the occupant.

"May I offer you a little book?" she asked, looking in at the window.

"Certainly not," was the abrupt answer.

"I must offer one to Mr. Filmer, then," said Irene very sweetly.

She had already gathered from the mere voice of the woman that her husband was probably the obsession of her mind, and she was satisfied at once with the effect of her guesswork.

"What do you know of my husband?" Mrs. Filmer asked sharply.

"Very little," answered Irene, smiling her particularly aggravating smile. "I am more interested in his friend Mr. Gilmour. Mr. Gilmour is very interesting to all of us just now, and any friend of his shares something of his not altogether enviable notoriety."

"Who are you?" Mrs. Filmer said quickly.

"Oh, nobody in particular," Irene answered. "Only I'm wondering what Mr. Gilmour, and perhaps his friends, are doing with this young lady that the trouble is all about."

Mrs. Filmer's compact little face was becoming distorted with curiosity and something more. She spoke rapidly and in a confidential whisper.

"Will you come to me at the Hotel Metropole tonight?" she asked. "I see that there is something

behind all this. If you will come there in a quarter of an hour I will give you a private interview."

It was at this moment that the two men emerged from the club. Irene nodded her agreement and moved away, but not before Gilmour had recognized her.

She was indifferent whether he had or not. It was not Gilmour who mattered so much at the moment as this friend of his, and she had seen enough already of Mrs. Filmer to be very sure that she would gain valuable information that night.

Gilmour had hung back for a moment, under the portico of the club; it was while he told his companion quickly of his discovery, and the next instant Irene Goldstone had disappeared.

"Come along, boy," called Mrs. Filmer, with a painfully feigned gaiety. "And perhaps Mr. Gilmour will take a lift too, as far as Charing Cross."

"But I've arranged to stay with Gilmour for the night," protested her husband at the cab door. "The fact is that he's not well. This thing has utterly upset him and he hardly cares to be alone. I have promised him my company."

Mrs. Filmer reflected rapidly and then spoke.

"It would be very unkind of me to object," she said, after only a momentary pause, "but I am not very well either. I think we had better compromise by asking Mr. Gilmour to take a room in our hotel. You can chat together as late as you like, and be together again in the morning. That will surely suit all of us."

"A good idea," said Filmer helplessly, with a glance towards Gilmour. "You'll do that, old man?"

Gilmour, irritated beyond measure, but with a good grace, consented. He would have got away if he could, if only from Filmer's importunities, which had consider-

ably startled him, but he knew that he was too much in the man's hands. Besides, there was the possible need of some explanatory conversation with Mrs. Filmer herself, if her suspicions had been aroused at all, and they certainly seemed to have been.

He got into the cab with the pair of them, and they drove off.

Irene Goldstone had already called up her assistant from the back of the building, to follow Gilmour if necessary, but when from the corner of the street she saw the two men drive off in Mrs. Filmer's cab, she took the woman along with her in her own vehicle, with instructions to wait outside the hotel while she went in.

Meanwhile, in the short journey to Northumberland Avenue, Filmer had vainly attempted to rescue the newspaper. Mrs. Filmer held it screwed firmly in her hand, and there was no possible excuse for taking it. In the foyer of the hotel she left them at once and took the lift to her room, from whence she telephoned instructions to the office for Miss Goldstone to be taken up to her immediately upon her arrival. Without any particular purpose in doing so, she thrust the newspaper along with her hand-bag, into a valise at the bottom of the bed, and turned the key. Then she returned to her husband and his friend.

"I shall chat," she said, "for a few minutes, and then I shall retire. Lloyd will not disturb me if he comes up within an hour as I am not a quick sleeper. We'll go to the drawing-room."

It wanted hardly ten minutes before Miss Goldstone would be due, and Mrs. Filmer contented herself with a very general conversation, only she took away her spray of heather and pinned it in her own hair. It was one of her peculiarities that she detested

to see him adorned in any way that she imagined might make him more attractive to her own sex. Just before the half-hour, she held out her hand and wished Gilmour good-night.

Two minutes later and Irene Goldstone was conducted to Mrs. Filmer's room.

The American's significant conversation at the cab door had aroused her curiosity to its utmost pitch. The merest association of Lloyd Filmer and any woman whatsoever was always unbalancing to her; the hint that had been dropped that he was mixed up in some way with this scandal about a vanished girl had made her almost beside herself.

She closed the door as soon as Irene had entered the room, and motioned her to a seat, but the little American detective was not a reposeful person, and preferred to stand.

"I understood you to say," commenced Mrs. Filmer, "that you are interested in this case of Mr. Gilmour's, and you even hinted or suggested that you—you connect my husband in some way with the matter. I want you to explain yourself to me quite clearly."

Irene Goldstone nodded.

"I have come to do just exactly that very thing," she said serenely, in her drawled-out American brogue. "I want to speak to you as woman to woman, if you will let me."

"Certainly," agreed Mrs. Filmer. "But who are you, and why are you interested in this extraordinary case, which I am very disturbed about myself? As you know, perhaps, I have a very clever husband, a man of an intensely artistic temperament, and the artistic temperament is always dangerous."

"Exactly," said Irene. "The artistic temperament

is super-imaginative, and exposes the lucky possessor to temptations that ordinary mortals like myself are safe from. The artistic temperament sees right through the external, into things beyond. It does not judge by fact, but by intuition, and a sort of intuition that——"

If Mrs. Filmer had not cut the little American lady short, Irene would have spoken at some length on this matter. If she had one feminine weakness it was a love of elaborate exposition of such themes that it was her pride to have gone very fully into. But Mrs. Filmer had repeated her original question:

"But, please, who are you?"

"I'm on the other side," answered Irene suavely.

"What other side?"

"I'm on the side of the young woman's friends. I represent the interests of the family—her father, and Lord Inkerman, whose good servant her father is. In other words, I am an investigator: Irene Goldstone investigator."

"I see," said Mrs. Filmer. "But you wouldn't tell me that you are involving my husband in this business?"

"I wouldn't tell you half I might know, Mrs. Filmer, unless there's the frankness of woman to woman, right here, between us."

Mrs. Filmer had enough intuition herself, artistic or inartistic, to hold out her hand, and Irene took it with a grip that was symbolic of the strength of her personality.

"Now, I'll tell you just what I'm thinking," she said, turning, now, to the chair, and seating herself. "I'm thinking that, perhaps very innocently, your husband is giving his friend Mr. Gilmour very dangerous assistance."

She held up her favourite authoritative finger and checked an exclamation on the lips of the other.

"My theory is that this unfortunate young woman, Iris Lees, is being kept hidden somewhere by Gilmour, and that finding himself unable to get to her, on account of my own somewhat tenacious espionage, he has sent his friend Filmer to her this very day. Someone has no doubt gone to her. It wasn't Gilmour, and I think it was—your husband."

Mrs. Filmer's excellent complexion had faded away. Her eyes had dilated as she watched the other, and now that she spoke it was almost incoherently.

"Why do you think this?" she asked.

"Well, we'll take our propositions. Proposition number one is that your husband has been somewhere—do you know where?"

"No, I don't."

"When you asked him about that heather, I think it was Gilmour who answered for him."

"Certainly; I noticed that at once."

"Proposition number two is that your husband has been down in the country, which is a very likely place to find heather in, and that the pair of them have their own reasons for wishing to conceal the little excursion."

"This is upsetting me very much!" exclaimed Mrs. Filmer abruptly. "This is upsetting me terribly."

"Very naturally," said Irene. "Secrets between husband and wife strike at the very root of the home, and the home is the keystone of civilisation. I think Mr. Filmer gave you a newspaper. Every clue is valuable. Can you find it? For instance, a three-o'clock edition of an evening paper might suggest that your husband was in town during the afternoon. These little things are simple, but sometimes important."

Mrs. Filmer had already gone to the valise, and she brought out the paper, putting it into Irene's hands.

"To-day's *Hatfield Times*," exclaimed the little woman. "We have struck ore, or I think we have. Heather and Hatfield, they are a little synonymous."

As she spread open the paper she stopped suddenly. "Fresh ore," she commented, and pointed to a pencilled name scrawled out in blue pencil across the back page.

"A Y O T," it read.

"We have here," said Irene, looking up, "the outside paper in a batch sent to Ayot station some time to-day, for this is certainly to-day's edition."

She unfolded the pages, and the next moment she was carrying the newspaper to the nearest of the electric brackets against the wall.

"This is good ore!" she exclaimed. "We might call this finding anthracite!" For the first time in the interview, she was revealing something approximate to excitement.

"Do you know the artist?" she inquired.

Mrs. Filmer snatched at the paper. She saw the sketches of a young girl's face and she read the pencilled name.

"No, I don't!" she exclaimed hoarsely.

"Thank you," said Irene. "I'm quite satisfied. You've carried out your bargain, Mrs. Filmer. You've spoken to me as woman to woman!"

CHAPTER XIII

The End of the Second Day. Filmer explains his Position—Miss Goldstone makes a Bargain—And Gilmour is the only one to go to Bed.

DOWN in the drawing-room of the hotel, where Mrs. Filmer had deposited them, the men were in almost heated altercation.

"You must follow her up and get that newspaper," Gilmour had demanded. "Why didn't you get hold of it in the cab? You don't seem to know danger when you see it."

"My dear fellow," said Filmer, "you can't expect me to put myself in my wife's way at a moment like this. You certainly don't know my wife. But she won't look at the paper, so why worry? I'll manage to get it some time to-night, but I can't rush it."

"If your confounded scribbling is found, everything's up. The girl's name and face scrawled over a paper published within a dozen miles of where I've put her! I tell you that American detective woman wasn't speaking to your wife at the cab for nothing. I know her!"

"I think you're overestimating Miss Goldstone's talents," answered Filmer. "There's no real clue about the paper, anyhow—the only danger is to me!"

"Why on earth you did it, I can't understand,"

Gilmour exclaimed, lowering his own guard dangerously, for the truth was that the revelation of Filmer's interest in the girl had aroused a storm of purely personal feelings within him that were stronger even than his alarm.

Filmer turned on him at once, with a new and dangerous look.

"I shouldn't trouble yourself too much about that side of it, Gilmour," he said coolly. "You've no particular acquaintance with the girl, by your own statement, and if I thought her pretty I'm hardly committing any breach of honour. I happen to be susceptible myself to a pretty face."

Gilmour stared at the man, but managed to mask his countenance. He realised only too surely that, for the moment at least, he was ensconced in the palm of Filmer's hand. The embarrassing secret was Filmer's now as much as his own, and he had already learnt enough to know that he was dealing with that most dangerous of all combinations of character—a spiteful fool.

Gilmour looked into the man's eyes and forced his lips into a pleasant smile.

Filmer had hoped to see the other wince, for he was quick-tempered, and now that Gilmour had unwisely roused him he made no scruple about hitting back.

"It's the girl's face that's got all of us into trouble," he went on, pitching his voice carefully enough, so that it did not go beyond Gilmour's ears. "If she'd been cross-eyed, for instance, I doubt if you'd not have bolted at the first sight of her. It's not surprising that this young man Francis has been making a fool of himself."

"That hardly justifies us in doing anything but help her. You don't argue that pretty faces are made for the purpose of getting their owners into trouble?"

"It's not an altogether unreasonable proposition, according to the experience of the world," answered Filmer, "but I'm not putting it forward. I only want to point out that you can't expect other people to be insensible. I've run just about as big a risk as you, now, and you must respect me as a principal in the affair, that's all."

Gilmour could have struck him where he stood, almost as easily as he could continue to wear his engaging smile. He looked towards the staircase, and saw Mrs. Filmer coming towards them.

"I'm afraid I want you, Lloyd," she said, walking quickly to them and forcing a strained smile.

Filmer protested that it was an hour too early for him to think of retiring.

"It's absurd to talk for an hour to-night," said Gilmour genially. "Let us talk in the morning."

Filmer was not impressed by this suggestion that Gilmour was in the habit of retiring early, and he smiled frankly.

"I will come in a quarter of an hour," he said to his wife, and she went away. She knew well enough that any scene she made that evening would be a big one.

Filmer turned to his companion. "We must chat. I haven't finished telling you why I want this money and how I want it."

Gilmour sat back in a chair and folded his arms.

"Fire away, then," he said pleasantly.

Filmer made a mental note that the menacing attitude was undoubtedly the one that was best likely to pay with this gentleman.

Gilmour, truth to tell, felt merely reckless now about every issue except the main one of removing Iris from the cottage. Filmer alone, if there had been no other complications, made the step so absolutely necessary. He had no doubt that Irene Goldstone would follow up Mrs. Filmer, and was very certain that trouble would come quickly from that quarter also, but Filmer was the real danger, and while the man talked Gilmour nodded and looked in reality straight through him, thinking his own thoughts.

Suppose Iris was traced to the cottage after he had succeeded in placing her elsewhere, was it at all likely that the police would be informed? Hardly, for Lord Inkerman's policy was to make as little more noise about the matter as he possibly could. The main reason for their going on with the persecution of the girl was obviously the hope that they might get her to give a public recognition to their story. They had forced Gilmour, or as they thought, they had forced him, into an untenable position. That was their trump card: his own deception of the police that morning.

Filmer, meanwhile, had finally reviewed his own affairs.

"I know a couple of hundred pounds is a good deal of money, old man," he said airily, "but, as I have pointed out, I shall repay it as soon as I can."

Gilmour nodded.

"It would take me a day to arrange it, if I found I could," he said pleasantly. "You know, I only have an income, which I spend. There is some residue money, but there are trustees—you understand."

"You won't mind giving me a cheque to-night anyway?" asked Filmer. "We may not get at one

another again, and of course I will hold it till you tell me it's all right."

"On that understanding," said Gilmour, "I'll give you one."

He found his cheque-book, and took it to a writing-table. He wrote the cheque out for two hundred pounds and handed it to Filmer.

"It is understood," he said, "that you only use it if I find I am able to arrange the matter and give you definite notice. It's a provisional arrangement in case I can manage it and we can't meet again. You must understand that I may not be able to do it at all."

"I think you'll find you can," was Filmer's only comment, when he had folded the cheque and placed it away in a pocket-book. "You won't find me remiss in my thanks, when it's gone through."

Gilmour held out his hand.

"Good-night," he said. "I shall fix my room up and get to bed; we can't do any more to-night. You must learn how the land lies with your wife and get hold of that newspaper if you can."

"See you at breakfast, then," said Filmer, who seemed himself to be not at all anxious to continue the conversation. "I shan't go up just yet—give my wife a chance to get to sleep. I'm going to have a midnight turn along the Embankment—Good-night."

"Good-night," said Gilmour.

Gilmour booked himself a room at the hotel, but before retiring he wrote and posted a letter to his bank instructing them that a cheque made out to L. Filmer was not, should it be presented, to be cashed without further instructions. Then he went to his bedroom—not to sleep, but to make his plans for the morrow,

Simultaneously Lloyd Filmer, on Charing Cross Railway Station, was penning a message to his own bank, enclosing the cheque which he had received. And simultaneously again, in a room not two doors from Gilmour's own, Mrs. Filmer was awaiting the coming of her husband.

Irene had proved more than a match for her, and her shot of "woman to woman" had not been ineffective.

"You think, then, that my husband is the artist?" she had asked, even in the face of her first denial.

"I will tell you just exactly what I think," Irene had said frankly. "I think that your good husband has allowed his feelings to run away with him in an effort to assist an unworthy friend, and that he has paid a visit to-day to Hertfordshire, where he has been in Miss Lees' no doubt very charming company."

Mrs. Filmer had come closer to the little American detective.

"Why do you jump to such a conclusion as that?" she had asked her. "Can't you see what it means to me?"

Irene had seen it long ago.

"Of course I may be wrong," she answered, "but I have just a little data to go by. For instance, although I have not seen Iris Lees, she has been described to me as peculiarly beautiful, and these sketches certainly suggest a very remarkable degree of prettiness. If they were not done from life they were done from memory, and according to Mr. Gilmour's story no one but himself saw the girl. The only possible explanation is that Mr. Gilmour described the young lady very accurately to his friend, but that would never account for the subtle quality of all these sketches. The face is drawn

three or four times, and there are always the same characteristics."

Mrs. Filmer was staring over Irene's shoulder at the sketches.

"It's a wicked face," she rasped out; "the last face that I should expect any man to take an interest in."

"It's very striking, anyway," Irene had said, with a smile that was not visible. "But, after all, the type of the person has very little to do with it. What does matter is that your husband has been reckless enough of his good name to have assisted Gilmour in this very ugly business. He has certainly seen this young woman, and I rely upon your helping me in every way to find where he saw her."

But Mrs. Filmer was already seeing the scandal side of the matter, and was drawing herself in rapidly.

"But it is merely a conclusion you have jumped to," she said, with a new note in her voice. "I am afraid we have both rather jumped to it. For instance, the drawings may not even be my husband's. I am certainly not at all convinced of it."

To herself she was promising Lloyd Filmer a terrible time of it as soon as she should be alone with him.

"So I understood," said Irene sweetly, "but, at least, you know that he gave you the newspaper. Perhaps you would prefer me to leave you right out of the question, at once, and go my own way?"

Mrs. Filmer did not accept the challenge, but engaged herself at once in appeasing her visitor.

"You are quite right," said Irene. "Your husband's interests need studying very closely in this crisis, and it would be a pity if my interests were not yours."

Was there any possibility of Mr. Filmer being brought within the arm of the law? That was the

new question that was disturbing his wife, and Irene gave her a plain promise. If she would help Miss Lees' friends to discover her whereabouts there need be no fear of the police being brought into the matter at all. Her clients wished to avoid any further publicity. It was merely a question of finding Irene Lees and removing her to her home quietly. Miss Goldstone reiterated her favourite dictum of the sanctity of the hearth, and professed, as she had done to Gilmour, that she had taken up the case mainly on principle. "I like to feel that when I take up a case I am going to make somebody the happier for it," she said.

It was just before midnight that Irene left the hotel, carrying with her the copy of *The Hatfield Times* and the sprig of heather.

Outside the building she promised the member of her staff whom she had left to watch for Gilmour an early relief of guard. Mrs. Filmer had assured her that he was sleeping at the hotel that night, and she felt that she had clue enough and start enough to leave him to her lieutenants for the moment. She took cab at once to the Chancery Lane office, but she did not go through to her sleeping-room. She switched on the lights in her office and commenced, instead, a very wide-awake examination of the evidence which she had collected.

CHAPTER XIV

The Third Day. Gilmour goes to Hendon and asks to be dropped at Knebworth—After a day of Depression he finds himself in the Clouds.

GILMOUR realised, too late, that he had made an enormous mistake in accepting the loophole that had been offered him at Dorchester Row. That was the time to have hurled the whole story in their teeth. Instead, he had swallowed the bait they had offered him, and now, frankly, found himself fooled. He was outside the help of the law; in fact, he stood in danger of it.

He felt a sense of rather childish irritation at the fact that any circumstance whatsoever should bar him in this way from free intercourse with the one woman who had ever interested him. He forgot that it was the price of finding that one woman, and chafed to think that there was this absurd impediment to his pursuing the joyful courtship which he was fully prepared to embark upon. There was Iris Lees—the one answer he had ever found to the riddle of his life; the greatest revelation that had ever come to him, staying a guest in his own house and he couldn't go to her! It was maddening!

Lying, fully dressed, on the bed in the hotel, he strove to think of some ingenious manner of evading the wary Irene. Then, abruptly, he thought of one plan that was perfectly feasible. He recalled that even at the

moment he had in his pocket a letter from Edgar Curtis, one of the most prospering of the younger flying men, inviting him to "look in" at Hendon and take a flight Gilmour had gone to college with Curtis, but he had hardly reckoned him a close friend. He had met him sometimes, at such gatherings as an inter-varsity boxing match, and the letter was the outcome of a telegram of congratulation Gilmour had despatched some weeks before, after a fine cross-country flight by the young airman.

The invitation had remained in Gilmour's pocket-book unanswered for a fortnight now. Flying did not appeal to him, it even repelled him, though he had meant to go down to the aerodrome and see Curtis fly. It was the exciting happenings of the last few days that had put it from his mind. Now he told himself that if he still found he was being shadowed he would go straight to Hendon, find out Curtis and urge him to take him somewhere into the Hatfield district. A lonely descent could probably easily be accomplished, and before the inevitable crowd had assembled he would be well on his way towards the cottage. Irene Goldstone could not be so very "close behind him," then, in spite of her boast.

The idea was singularly exciting and exhilarating. He would not have attempted a flight in cold blood, but here was a reason good enough and strong enough to give him the feeling of justification that made all the difference. Let the experience be as disagreeable as it might, he would go through with it.

Sleep seemed to be out of the question, but he was not disposed to make himself uncomfortable in any further attempt to evade those who were watching him. Let them shadow him to Hendon, and see him

make his flight, if he was to make it. He would trust to the idea itself to carry him through.

He passed the night quite tolerably, and towards morning fell into a slumber that lasted until the reasonable hour of six, when he attended very carefully to his toilet, enjoyed a substantial breakfast and left the hotel, for flying men are early risers, and Curtis might well be on the field.

He recognised one of the two women who had followed him from Holborn on the previous morning, as soon as he had left the building, and he laughed to himself. A cab took him direct to Hendon, with another travelling assiduously in its rear.

He reached the aerodrome a little before half-past seven, and was told that Mr. Curtis had arrived a few moments before him. The grounds were not open to the public, but he was at once admitted.

He looked back just before he passed into the flying ground, and perceived a decidedly uncomfortable-looking lady in conversation with her driver. He left her with the pleasant feeling, enjoyed for the first time since he had come in contact with Irene Goldstone and her staff, that he was getting the best of it.

From the office Gilmour was conducted past a number of large sheds to one towards the end of the grounds, where he found Curtis himself, overhauling an immense machine that had just been brought out.

A tall and romantic figure this young airman made. A leather flying-cap was perched on the back of his head, and a long dustcoat enveloped him. A cigarette gleamed between compressed lips, making a splash of white against a deeply sunburned face. Gilmour noted that curious phenomenon, the flying eye. Curtis's eyes were large and dark, and as he walked around his

wondrous apparatus, feeling a stay here, a screw there; there was the look in the wide orbs of a man who sees far beyond, into the infinite.

He swung round at Gilmour's voice, and the next moment was wringing his friend's hand with a grip of steel.

"Just the best time to come over," he exclaimed, pushing his leathern headgear still farther back on a high forehead that was framed with close-cropped brown hair. "I shall be delighted to have a passenger this morning, and everything's in perfect tune. Have you been up before?"

Gilmour confessed that he had not—except once in a balloon.

"Did you like it?" Curtis asked, still holding the cigarette between his teeth, and opening his lips in a wide smile.

"I liked it while it was moving," Gilmour answered. "I hated the slow drift—it got on my nerves at the finish."

"Exactly," agreed Curtis. "Well, there's no slow drift about aeroplaning. If you've got an air stomach you're all right. Do you want to limit me as to how high we go, or how long we're up? I generally find I have to make profound promises of that nature."

Gilmour forced himself to answer with spirit.

"I only wish you were going out into the country a few miles, old man," he replied. "I've got to be down in Hertfordshire this morning. If you could have dropped in that direction, for instance."

Curtis looked at him and he laughed again.

"You're pretty game, then?" he said. "I had thought of running out for a little trip—a moderate

little flight beyond London." He turned to a young engineer, and called to him, "Say, Turner, just fetch me my Hertford chart."

Curtis turned back to his engines, and for a few minutes became lost in the inspection. It was no idle matter, this overhauling of an aeroplane, and Gilmour stood back, venturing no further comment until he was spoken to.

The engineer had returned with a sheet of planned out Bristol-board, and also stood waiting. Then, abruptly, Curtis swung back to his visitor, his teeth gleaming and his lips smiling again.

"Came just right, you know, Gilmour," he ejaculated, and took the chart.

"I've got a little flight worked out here," he went on, tapping the cardboard: "St Albans, and Harpenden, winding up with a swing round beyond Hitchin, to Stevenage, and then home over the Great North Road to Barnet, and on to here—a little matter of about an hour.

Gilmour looked at the chart. He noted a large house marked to the west of Welwyn.

"Knebworth House," said Curtis.

"Could you drop me somewhere near there?" asked Gilmour.

"Don't use that word 'drop,'" laughed Curtis. "We bar it. I will gently alight with you anywhere you like."

"Well, if you'll gently alight with me somewhere near Knebworth," said Gilmour, "you will be doing me an immense service."

"Not coming back?"

"I must be out there this morning—for a day or two," answered Gilmour.

He wondered if Curtis had heard of his affair, but he gave no signs of it, and Gilmour concluded that flying-men live too fast to follow every triviality of the hour. He hoped so.

Curtis turned to his chief engineer.

"Turner," he said, "don't let it go out that I'm making a cross-country flight. It's just an idea that'll occur to me when I'm up, you understand?"

"I understand," answered Turner.

Curtis turned to Gilmour with a word of explanation. "I'm in rather the experimental stage with a new engine here," he remarked quietly. "I've never tried it at any great strain on a biplane before, and we may have to come down. It's better not to say what one is going to do in a case like this. Fortunately, if I cut down I can get up again with one man at a pinch, that's another of my little secrets."

Gilmour felt the first uneasy tremor traverse the outside of his flesh, but he concealed it successfully. Young Curtis had a manner of sheer confidence about him that in itself disarmed alarm. To look into the clear, healthy face, with the eye of a hawk and the flush of life and spirit animating the quick, mobile features, made it difficult to think of accidents and of death.

Nevertheless it was an odd sensation, standing down there in the sunshine, by the side of that great winged machine, and to know that in a few minutes he would find himself being borne at prodigious speed through the very clouds, the people on the earth appearing as a panorama of midgets below him.

He looked down at the soft turf and noted the grass about his shoes, and he looked up again quickly,

recognising that he had best do this thing without much speculation.

Curtis had thrown off his overall, revealing himself in a tight-fitting suit, not unlike a rider's. There were close-fitting leather breeches, and closer gaiters. The upper part of the garment was a leather-lined jacket worn over a finely knitted brown jersey.

"I'll find you a cap," said Curtis, "and you'd better button everything up. The propeller will very nearly draw you into it, if you're not careful."

A man brought him out a leathern cap, and he pulled it on, clipping the flaps underneath his chin.

Gilmour looked up at the sky and all about him. It seemed an ideal moment for a flight. A few perfectly white clouds were drifting slowly across the azure blue heavens. Also he heard a lark singing almost directly above him, and that sound gave him sudden confidence. The lark was thinking so little of the danger of it that he was swelling his song out in the faith and joy of life. He drowned the murmurings of agitation by whistling a bar of an air himself.

Curtis had become suddenly wirily active. He ran round among the great wings and wires with terrific agility, allowing nothing to escape him, and then, standing back, he sang out to a group of men who had come around the machine

"Run her a little forward."

The huge and altogether mysterious-looking thing came forward silently along the grass and stopped again, its nose pointed out towards the centre of the great spreading field.

Curtis walked up to it and tried the engines, and Gilmour stepped back. For a few moments only

there was a terrific swirl in the air, with cracking detonations, then it was shut off again and he found himself beckoned to.

Curtis was already climbing up among the stays, until he had reached a giddy seat among the labyrinth of wires, and perched himself at a strange angle in a steel seat.

"Up you come, Gilmour," he shouted.

Gilmour was already acting mechanically. He had mastered his nerves by deadening them. He allowed himself to be hoisted upwards, and landed in a few moments at a second seat by the side of Curtis.

"Settle yourself down," Curtis was calling to him. "Brace your feet up against that foot-rest, and lie well back."

Gilmour obeyed all these orders. He thought of a dentist's chair, and found himself picturing the latter as a luxury and as a place for pleasant experiences.

But everything was happening with bewildering suddenness. He had barely "settled down," and taken a steady grip on the stays beside him, when he heard Curtis speaking his final orders with a thrilling quietness.

"Everyone there?"

"Ay, sir."

Curtis was looking steadily about him, but the look on his face was almost transfiguring.

Gilmour, watching, saw an expression that was a revelation to him in its sheer intensity. A little of the colour had gone out of so much of the sunburned cheeks as was visible about the leathern flaps, but the smile had not diminished. It had become a grin—a grin of exaltation.

Suddenly his left arm went out and the hand lifted.

There was a moment of dead silence. Gilmour saw the man at the helm of this immense bird stretch forward. Then instantly there came a deafening roar. There was sudden bewildering movement and noise. Gilmour felt a very gale strike him in the face, there was the sensation of going forward, and looking down he saw that they were already well away from the ground.

He sat back with his teeth set fixedly. He felt the great body that was supporting him sway sickeningly from side to side. He looked down, as if by some fierce attraction, and saw the green grass far below, and the tops of the sheds, and very small people.

He looked round at Curtis, and saw from the angle of his body that they were turning. He felt the sway becoming a list, the list a veritable keel. Then, with a great swing, like the swing of a pendulum, the equilibrium was suddenly found and they were coursing straight ahead, with the deafening swirl of the propeller below them, and the wind blowing a supergale that pinned Gilmour back against his seat as though a vice gripped him.

Already the nausea was gone; the horror of the first moment. He drew in a deep breath and looked about him at the machine. He was at home now in this new element. He saw the sun striking about it and casting steady black shadows; he saw the brown of the jersey that Curtis was wearing and noted a green tassel flying at the neck of it. That tassel was a small matter, but it made him feel that he was somewhere where things were tangible.

CHAPTER XV

The Third Day. Irene in Pursuit and Gilmour in full Flight
—Mr. Curtis yawns and Gilmour takes off his Flying
Cap.

IRENE GOLDSTONE left King's Cross Station on her way to Ayot St. Peter exactly half-an-hour before Gilmour flew from Hendon with Edgar Curtis.

She had sent a deputy to watch for Gilmour outside the hotel soon after daybreak. All night shadowing outside a fashionable hotel is dangerous for any but official investigators; the spy himself is apt to get into trouble. At certain times of the day it is less noticeable for men to watch, at other times women. The first watch had been abandoned at about two in the morning. A starving-looking man put in the early hours of the day, and ostensibly a lady journalist took her place outside the hotel at six o'clock. This was the woman who had followed Gilmour to Hendon.

Irene had spent an entirely satisfactory couple of hours in her office before retiring for a brief rest. She had located Ayot St. Peter, and she considered the clue of *The Hatfield Times* an all-important one. The heather merely interested her. She was more than hopeful that at Ayot station she would pick up the actual scent, and succeed in tracing him to whatever place he had visited. She had simply waited for the first train in the morning.

Overnight she had written a brief message to Henry Lees, telling him to be at "The White Horse," Welwyn, at ten o'clock with the car.

She was accompanied on the journey from King's Cross by the chief of her staff, a woman of about her own age, and both of them had put bicycles on the train.

It was immediately after Hatfield was left that from the train window Irene Goldstone perceived a biplane flying at a considerable height and a tremendous speed directly across the railway line.

The incident did not particularly interest her, beyond imparting the thrill which the sight of an aeroplane in flight always arouses, and she turned to her companion.

"Say, Miss Silby," she drawled out, "I guess our friend Gilmour could hardly do better than escape our attention that way. I'm waiting to hear of the first criminal to avoid justice by taking literally to flight."

Miss Silby smiled the smile of the dependant. She was an American woman herself, and she ventured the opinion that the idea was a peg above the altitudes of Gilmour's insular brain.

In the brief glimpse they had caught of the machine the black figures of two passengers had been visible. One was Robert Gilmour himself.

The two women alighted only a few minutes later at Ayot station, and Irene Goldstone commenced her investigations at once. She sized up the solitary porter who met the train, and decided on frankness.

"I'm engaged in a little legal investigation," she commenced, "and I should like to see the porter who was on duty yesterday afternoon."

The porter informed her that he himself was.

Had he noticed the gentleman alight whom she would describe to him?

The porter had noticed the gentleman, and he had asked what direction he should take for the neighbourhood of Kimpton.

Irene's face flushed with triumph, and she put a florin into the man's hand. That the gentleman had asked for Kimpton was the limit of his knowledge, and she turned to go.

It was at this moment that a young booking-office clerk came up on to the platform and looked at the two ladies. He was carrying a telegram in his hand.

"Would either of you be Miss Goldstone?" he asked. "Passenger off the seven-fifteen from King's Cross?"

"That's me," said Irene.

She took the telegram, tore open the envelope and read:

"Gilmour left Hendon by biplane at 7.45. Flew north."

Irene Goldstone was betrayed into an ejaculation of amazement.

"Say, we'll get right off," she exclaimed to her companion, and on the way down into the street she imparted to the other the surprising information which she had just received.

"My! We're up against something with an edge to it, after all!" was Miss Silby's comment.

Down in the street they found that they were not many minutes behind their quarry. Out at the doors and standing in groups about the roadway, people were

discussing the machine which had passed overhead apparently some ten minutes before.

"Which way did it go?" they asked, preparing to mount their bicycles.

An old farm labourer laughed at the question.

"You'll never see they no more," he chuckled. "They be gone on."

They learnt the direction, however, and started off, and though the country lanes were very deserted they every now and then passed a wayfarer who had seen the aeroplane. They also discovered with complete satisfaction that they were making in the right direction for Kimpton. Evidently the flying men had done the same.

"I wish now," said Irene, as they pedalled swiftly along a leafy lane, where the mud of a night shower clung heavily to the roads, "that I'd come out by motor, but I thought it would be a matter of quiet inquiry. I hardly thought we'd hit on things like this. It seems hailing luck, but it can't hit us too hard."

They had taken a steep and winding path that led down into the valley of the Mimram, and here, with the good news that they were within a mile of Kimpton, they rode on at top speed. They were more than half-an-hour behind the machine now, but it had been seen.

They reached Kimpton, and asked at once in the village street: "Which way did the aeroplane go?"

But at Kimpton the flying men had already lost their vital interest. They had been seen, but were flying hard and had disappeared almost instantly, away towards Stevenage, or perhaps Hitchin.

"Any sign of them coming down?" But the answer

was, "None at all." The machine seemed to be mounting higher every moment, and the hum of the engines could hardly be heard at all; no doubt but it was going a long way.

This was disappointing. For one thing, they were almost an hour behind now, and it did not look as if Kimpton, or even the immediate district, had been Gilmour's destination. And every minute they were dropping far behind in the chase.

The Kimpton clue was important, yet they could return to it. The biplane, with presumably Gilmour in it, was the important clue, and they rode on again in the direction they were told it had taken.

It was an absolute by-road now, with no sign of any living thing, and when after twenty minutes' hard going through slush and grit they espied a labourer working out in a field they left their machines and went across to him.

"Have you seen the flying machine?"

"Ay, before breakfast," he answered. "It come down t'other side of the hill there, but it went on again."

To Gilmour, meanwhile, the whole experience had passed like a flash. He had sat back in his seat, pinned there by the wind, and with the return of a steady head after the evolutions of the ascent he had found it possible to look serenely enough about him and enjoy the happening. His first interest had entirely concerned the machine itself. There was no sensation of a frail thing at the mercy of the elements. It seemed, rather, an immense power in itself that nothing could conceivably destroy. The wind gave way before it, and it caught a grip upon the atmosphere as firm as a horse's feet upon the turf.

As he looked about him it seemed as if he were upon a ship ; a thing of weight and importance.

Presently he looked down, and he found that the sight gave him no vertigo. There is a limit, apparently, to such sensations, and the aeroplane carries one beyond them. Only the machine seemed tangible, the earth a mere vision of unreality. He saw the green fields stretching out below him and the network of roads and railways near London ; a mere map, devoid of any detail whatsoever.

Edgar Curtis, as a matter of fact, had gone a little out of his course after leaving Edgeware, and had passed St. Albans too much to the east. This accounted for the machine being seen above the railway near Ayot. It was shortly afterwards, when the course had been righted again, that Gilmour felt the machine rising rapidly. Then for a few seconds it seemed to slow a little as it still climbed upward ; the next moment and it was swooping to earth.

It was then that nausea came to him. No experience of toboggan or switchback that had been his, equalled the sheer breathlessness of that descent. Breath and body seemed alike to have been left behind in the clouds, but almost as instantly they were dipping upwards again, and after a series of strange birdlike antics, giving the ground a succession of the merest touches, the great man-made bird alighted out in the centre of a field.

Gilmour, gasping for breath, straightened himself up in his seat and looked at Curtis.

The flying man was yawning.

Then the quick eyes glanced towards him, and the smile illumined the face again.

"Here you are," he called out. "You can get down now."

Gilmour let himself stiffly to the ground, and looked dazedly about him. Curtis had already dropped nimbly to the turf, and came round to him genially.

"That was a real experience for the first time," he laughed, "and you stood it well."

Gilmour already found his head clear again. His hands were cold and he walked around, swinging them together, drumming his feet on the turf, and commencing to laugh. "Grand!" he exclaimed. "But it's not altogether disappointing to be down here again."

"It is to me," said Curtis. "And I must get aloft. I think you can start me off. We're a little on the downgrade here. A very good pitch for an ascent, and I want to lose no time. As a matter of fact we were running at something very like a record for a machine of this size. She's a darling, though." Gilmour saw Curtis put a hand up and pat the steel-work above him as if caressing a living thing.

Then the airman made a brief overhauling examination and took his seat again. The incline proved sufficient and Gilmour, running at the rear, found himself swept almost from the ground, as the engines started. A second later and the monstrous machine was aloft, with the man at the helm waving a hand to his late passenger. Two minutes later and the biplane had disappeared over the trees of a copse half-a-mile away.

Gilmour turned towards a gate at the end of the field, and realised that he was still wearing the leathern flying-hat. He stowed it away in his pocket and exchanged it for his own cap.

It was at the gate that he met a man running.

"Seen a flying machine come down?" he was shouting.

"Yes," answered Gilmour, "and it's gone up again."

The man rested breathless against the gate. He had run from his cottage a mile away, and now across the fields a little crowd of men and women came racing towards them.

Gilmour was accepted as the lucky man who had seen the happening. He told of the two passengers, and how they had gone aloft again, the one who wasn't steering looking a bit sick.

He discovered cautiously that he had alighted near some farm premises a mile below Knebworth House, and was within another mile of the cottage on the heath where the girl was waiting.

And the time that he arrived at the cottage synchronised with the moment when Irene Goldstone and her companion were approaching Kimpton from Ayot station. And Kimpton was less than two miles from the cottage.

CHAPTER XVI

The Third Day. Bare Feet, and "Do you mind looking out of the Window?"—A see-saw Conversation, an Interruption, and a Pot of Mustard—Iris explains that a Girl must look after herself

At a quarter to nine Gilmour came to the heath and saw the little ivy-covered house standing in its picturesque position on a knoll of upland.

He went feverishly to the wicket-gate. Then, after curiously hesitating, he opened it, and, passing through, went to the porch, and knocked there on the door.

He was waiting, listening anxiously, when he heard a rustle of garments behind him, and swinging round was in time to observe a stream of auburn hair and what looked like a bare foot disappearing around a corner of the house.

"Iris," he exclaimed, and walked out into the garden.

Iris's voice came back to him from behind a laburnum bush.

"The door's open. If you'll go in I'll join you in a minute. *Please* go in."

Gilmour obeyed, and went into the house and through into the sitting-room. He was a little puzzled.

An abrupt voice came from the hall, almost immediately.

"Do you mind looking out at the window? I'm not quite—I'm not properly—I'm not exactly——"

"All right," answered Gilmour, and looked out through the diamond squares at the sunlit patches of green grass and bright flowers, and the serene outlines of trees and hedges. There was a stealthy movement of lightning rapidity back in the room behind him, and then the racing of almost silent footsteps up the wooden staircase.

This new encounter was singularly disturbing to him, but he recovered a little when he heard Iris moving more noisily about upstairs.

She came down into the room within ten minutes with a chilling air of sedateness. Her hair had been plaited and wound about her head with an austere tidiness, and she received him with a very formal "Good-morning."

Most people manage one another by a sort of see-saw policy of behaviour. Thus Iris immediately counteracted any possible advantage that might have been taken of the situation; Gilmour, on the other hand, resented quite so much rigidity, and counteracted it again by an extreme aloofness on his own part. Then Iris smiled shyly, and he replying by smiling a little too much, Iris became slightly formal again; and so on until, by a series of rapid changes of front, they were presently talking rationally to one another.

Gilmour had been looking forward with unbelievable longing to being face to face with Iris again, but now that he was, a strange and almost insipid humour seemed to have descended upon him. He hardly looked into her face—really because he hardly dared to—and in a dull fashion he related all that had happened to him, finding himself incapable of even adorning the narrative by a fine choice of words.

Iris's indignation at the published story that she had

run away with the chauffeur reduced her even to tears.

Gilmour, who had been commencing to suspect a slight absence of what is called heart, was astonished at this display of so much feeling, and was even more pleasantly surprised when she allowed herself to weep in his arms. That is to say that, seeing her tears he had seized the opportunity to put a hand on her shoulder, and she had buried her face against his waistcoat.

"The brutes," she cried in smothered gulps which vibrated against his chest. "As if I would have! To try to make me out such a born idiot as that, and as if I hadn't any self-respect at all!"

Gilmour argued to himself that they were bound to get on now, and that there couldn't be any more coldness. It was an altogether delightful sensation to look down at Iris's golden head and know that she was abandoning herself to such a complete act of friendship, though a certain melancholy strain in his constitution told him that it could not possibly last long.

This latter prognostication was quite correct, for within a very few moments there came an abrupt knocking at the door.

Iris disengaged herself from his arms with an almost violent precipitance.

The knocking was repeated, and then Iris slipped quietly up the bedroom stairs.

She came down again a moment later and drew Gilmour back from the passage, where he had gone to reconnoitre, and closed the door.

"It's Mr. Filmer," she whispered.

Gilmour realized the difficulty of the situation and muttered an underbreath of exasperated disgust. Did

Filmer, then, know that he had reached the cottage, or was he daring to come to Iris of his own accord?

Iris answered the question.

"He could not be sure that you are here," she whispered. "Hadn't I better see him alone? I will get rid of him if I can—if not, of course, you are here."

"Why answer the door at all?" asked Gilmour. As he spoke there came another rattle against the panels, louder and more peremptory than before.

"It will be best to see him," said Iris. "He may be much more dangerous if he is not admitted. I will see him, and I will get rid of him if I can."

Gilmour agreed, and she went from the room. He stood listening at the door and heard her go down the passage and unfasten the bolts.

"Good-morning, Miss Lees."

It was Filmer's voice, half honeyed, half something altogether different.

"Good-morning," came back Iris's response.

She was apparently standing at the door, offering no welcome to the visitor, for now Gilmour heard Filmer's voice again, and the honey was gone out of it.

"You are going to ask me in?"

"I would really rather not," he heard Iris answer. "You know I am alone and I promised Mr. Gilmour that I would admit no one. Cannot we talk at the door here?"

"Not what I have to say. No," Filmer answered.

"But if you please, yes," Iris was saying very quietly. Gilmour heard the other's voice rise threateningly.

"You might be decently hospitable, Iris," he heard the man saying. "I can be your friend just as much as Gilmour, and I wish to be. You must have sense

enough to see that you want all the friends you can get just now."

"I don't understand you."

"Then let me come in and explain."

Gilmour stood at the door of the living-room with his breath coming and going with dangerous audibility.

"But why do you wish to see me?" he heard Iris ask very calmly. "Have you brought a message from Mr. Gilmour?"

"Ask me in, nicely, and you shall hear everything. I am not going to talk on the doorstep."

"Very well, then," said the girl quietly. "You must come in, Mr. Filmer, since you seem to demand it, and since I, as you remind me, need friends so badly. Will you walk through into the sitting-room?"

Gilmour heard Filmer stop after he had taken one step past the girl down the hall. He was evidently turning back to speak to her. His voice was very amiable again.

"I didn't mean to frighten you, Iris. We'll be good pals very soon, you see if we won't. I think we're going to get on all right."

"The sitting-room, please," repeated Iris. And Gilmour heard the front door close.

He was still in the sitting-room himself, and stepping back, he hesitated, looking about him. His inclination was to stay and confront Filmer, but there could be little harm in prolonging the situation for a moment. Indignant as he was, he saw that it was still just possible that the man would go in peace, and made up his mind to at least delay discovery for the instant. He went to a little door at the end of the room leading upstairs, and passing through he stood listening on the bottom step of the staircase.

An instant later and he heard Filmer enter the room, and Iris follow him.

There was a pause, filled in by the sound of a door closing.

Then came Filmer's voice, low and soft:

"I'm awfully sorry if I seem rather insistent, but you don't understand how much I wish to help you."

The girl's answer came back, apparently softened too:

"I am afraid it is I who seem insistent. Perhaps I have grown nervous."

"Well," answered Filmer, "I've only come to see you and ask how you are getting on. Gilmour still can't get here, and I thought you ought not to be left alone. I thought there might be something I could do."

"There is," Gilmour heard the girl answer.

"I'm glad."

"You can promise not to come here any more."

Filmer's voice had an uncomfortable laugh in it when it came again.

"If you knew a little more of men in general, and of me in particular, you would act a little more discreetly, Iris. You've got all a schoolgirl's ideas of vice and virtue. If you want to make a stage villain of me you're going about it the right way. As a matter of fact, men are not usually black or white. They're grey. I've come down, as a normal grey man, attracted by your pretty face, just to have a look at it again."

"I ask you to please go." Iris was speaking very quickly now.

Gilmour heard the key turning in the lock of the living-room door, and Filmer laugh.

"Now don't be so beastly unsociable, Iris."

When Gilmour threw open the stair's door it was

to an accompanying crash within the room. He had sprung forward to hurl himself upon the other. Instead he saw Filmer staggering back with a sleeve of his coat shielding his face.

"Open the door," said Iris, with astonishing authority. Filmer had reeled towards it, groping for the key.

The girl was standing, breathing heavily, by the window, with a cup of mustard in her hand.

Holding himself in check, Gilmour waited a moment to see what would happen.

Filmer, still shielding his eyes, unlocked the door and reeled into the passage, shouting an incoherent babel of oaths. Then Iris ran forward and Gilmour saw her thrust the man down the hall and out on to the porch. The next instant and the front door had closed upon him.

She came back panting triumphantly.

"You're an extraordinary creature," remarked Gilmour, staring at her a little lamely. "I feel I've got to learn to know you all over again after this."

"It was really you," she said. "If I'd been alone I should have been too frightened for words."

Gilmour went to one of the front rooms and looked out.

He felt that something had happened which withdrew from him a cherished right. The protection of the weaker sex was a sort of privilege which in this case he had thought particularly his. To see the weaker sex flinging pots of mustard and protecting themselves was a revelation.

Iris appeared to know exactly what was passing through his mind, for as he gazed from behind the

curtains and caught a glimpse of Filmer wiping his face in the roadway beyond the gate, he felt a hand lightly touching his shoulder and a penitent voice whispering at his ear.

"You mustn't mind," Iris was saying. "It's not a habit of mine."

Gilmour looked into a preternaturally solemn countenance.

"Besides," murmured Iris, "a woman has so much to think of. "I didn't want him to know that you were here with me, and I only thought of it at that very moment. A girl must look after herself."

CHAPTER IV

IN THE DAY OF THE GREAT AND THE LITTLE exchange
businessmen and business—The Fall of Business
and the business—It was never

There were many over the moon and many
making up a better part in the smarting
business. He had been told that he had
a way to go that he had been told with, yet
he had not a way to go that he had been told
to go. For the moment he was disconcerted
by the whole business. Presently he looked back
over his shoulder, and the first of which was just visible
among the trees and through the foliage by a flow
of water that was very noticeable when he
heard a voice calling to him from the roadway a
hundred yards away from the hotel.

He turned about and saw two women cyclists waving
to him.

His impulse was to turn away and resume his walk,
but being prevailed and he turned to catch the mean-
ing of their shrugs.

"Did you see an aeroplane anywhere?"

It sounded somehow, like a deliberately insulting
question, and, without vouchsafing the smallest
further notice, he walked on.

"My!" an American voice was drawling out, at
the same moment, "if that isn't Mr. Filmer himself."

The next instant and the two cyclists were pedalling back along the road to where they could intercept the tall, striding figure.

"And heather, too," Irene was exclaiming, as she led the way. "I think we've pitched!"

Filmer had not looked to the right or the left, and when he stepped into the roadway from the heath it was to find the cyclists bearing down upon him.

"Mr. Filmer," came a pleasant voice.

"Miss Goldstone, is it?" exclaimed Filmer, as she dismounted at his side.

"Have you been following me here, then?" The question was asked, with almost a shout of indignation. For the moment he associated the woman only with his wife, and thought of his domestic peril.

"No," answered Irene, smiling upon him. "I've been following Mr. Gilmour, but perhaps it's very much the same thing."

She turned round to her lieutenant.

"Miss Silby, I want you to ride into Welwyn and find Mr. Lees at the White Horse. Jump right in the car and bring him here. Mr. Filmer and I are going to have a little chat."

"But look here——!" exclaimed Filmer. Half puzzled, he was beginning already to see possibilities in this interview.

"And you can bring me a ham sandwich," Irene was calling after the disappearing bicycle. "Now, Mr. Filmer."

Filmer was thinking with lightning rapidity Gilmour's secret, that was what this fair-haired little woman was after, and he would sell it; yes, he would sell it; revenge and money, here were two things that were both sweet; but if he was not careful it would be

CHAPTER XVII

The Third Day. Mr. Filmer and Miss Goldstone exchange Compliments and Metaphors—The Call of Business and a Discussion—Mr. Lees arrives.

FILMER went slowly over the heath, and many nodding sprigs of heather paid for his smarting countenance. He had been relieved to find that it was not vitriol that he had been met with, yet the fact that it was mustard seemed to only add to the insult. For the moment he was dumbfounded by the whole incident. Presently he looked back towards the house, the roof of which was just visible through the trees, and relieved his feelings by a flow of vituperation that was only interrupted when he heard a voice shouting to him from the roadway a hundred yards across the heath.

He turned about, and saw two women cyclists waving to him.

His impulse was to turn away and resume his walk, but habit prevailed and he listened to catch the meaning of their shouts.

"Did you see an aeroplane anywhere?"

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"Have you been following me here, then?" The question was asked, with almost a shout of indignation. For the moment he associated the woman only with his wife, and thought of his domestic peril.

"No," answered Irene, smiling upon him. "I've been following Mr. Gilmour, but perhaps it's very much the same thing."

She turned round to her lieutenant.

"Miss Silby, I want you to ride into Welwyn and find Mr. Lees at the White Horse. Jump right in the car and bring him here. Mr. Filmer and I are going to have a little chat."

"But look here——!" exclaimed Filmer. Half puzzled, he was beginning already to see possibilities in this interview.

"And you can bring me a ham sandwich," Irene was calling after the disappearing bicycle. "Now, Mr. Filmer."

Filmer was thinking with lightning rapidity Gilmour's secret, that was what this fair-haired little woman was after, and he would sell it; yes, he would sell it; revenge and money, here were two things that were both sweet; but if he was not careful it would be

given—thrown away. He pulled out a cigarette and lit it slowly before he spoke.

"I like something about you, Miss Goldstone," he said coolly, "so we may get on together. I like your cheek."

Irene smiled brightly at him.

"And as I like your manners, Mr. Filmer, we've made a very good beginning to our friendship."

Filmer bowed.

"Frankly," went on Miss Goldstone, "I prefer bad manners to bad sense, and I feel very sure that your sense is good enough. That is why I feel it quite worth my time—and my time is not valueless—to make your acquaintance. It's one thing to shadow a man and another to know him."

"The man is more substantial than his shadow," Filmer suggested.

"I never talk enigmatically," Irene answered. "I am a citizen of a country where we are taught to call a spade a spade. I talk in blunt facts. We have come to market, you and I, that's all that there is in this situation."

"That's metaphorical," laughed Filmer.

Irene looked at him and produced her crocodile hand-bag. She brought a cheque-book forth from it.

"And is that metaphorical too?" she asked.

Filmer's eyes gleamed the answer. Inadvertently they also glanced away across the heath towards the cottage, but the rise of the ground had hidden it from any view.

"Now, Mr. Filmer," she went on, "I only hope that you are one of those rare, intelligent men that can see a given situation with a clear eye. I hope you're not a e-waster. Above all, I hope you are not a

vacillator. Let us talk this thing right out on the hypothesis that I will treat you fairly, and when the car gets here let's have it all fixed. There's only one point, and I don't want you to bluff or banter about it. What is your price?"

Filmer felt a wave of impotent rage come over him. To vacillate, bluff and banter was a favourite method of striking bargains with him, indeed the only way he understood, and the steady, sharp eyes that kept themselves fixed upon his own seemed to threaten that they would read him through. They almost stopped his brain from working at all. He wanted to take his time, to fix his price and fix it at the uppermost figure. Bluff and banter he must, or he would find himself making a present of all he knew.

"I'm afraid I don't know facts from metaphors," he said slowly. "According to my insular ideas of language, you have still to tell me what you are talking about."

"You disappoint me," exclaimed the little woman.

"Well, I'm sorry," said Filmer.

Irene looked across the waste of heather.

"I'm wondering if I hadn't better say good-bye to you, Mr. Filmer," she remarked. "I daresay that after all I could get on just as well without you. It was useful, this little meeting, but I don't think I need trouble you any more. I don't think I've far to look now for what I want to find."

Filmer was not as cool a hand in dealing with the bluff of others as he was in dealing with bluff of his own manufacture. Besides, the woman certainly was within a stone's throw almost of the cottage. He checked as well as he could the obvious haste with which he sought to recover the lost ground.

"Look here, Miss Goldstone," he exclaimed, "all I ask of you is to drop these figures of speech. It may be an American's idea of bluntness but it's not mine. What do you want to find? Perhaps I know, but I'm niggling enough to want you to say it."

Irene was hurt at the allusion to her conception of plain speech. Nothing irritated her like denial of her tenets. But the call of business was even stronger in her breast, and she smothered her feelings after permitting a slight concession to them.

"We won't talk about race ideals, Mr. Filmer," she said stiffly, "till we've got a little more leisure than we have just now—then perhaps I'll have something to say under that heading—but since you're the niggler you confess to, let me tell you right here that I want the place where Iris Lees is hiding. Though I meant what I said, I don't think I've got far to look if I look on my own account."

Filmer would have given much to have been a mile farther from the cottage. There it stood, barely out of sight from the road—in full view, a hundred yards across the heath—the only habitation within a mile.

His brain was normally one that worked swiftly towards cunning ends, and he replied at once.

"It's quite true," he said, "that I'm on my way there, but you're asking me to sell a friend."

Irene's eyes had never shifted from his own.

"I should have thought, Mr. Filmer," she said coolly, "that you were on your way back."

There is a trick common to most liars of calling up all the semblance of genuine indignation at any aspersion upon their word. Filmer's eyes flashed

furiously, and his voice became harsh and expressionless.

"This is an absolute end of any further conversation between us, Miss Goldstone," he exclaimed. "Good-morning."

He turned on his heels, and as he strode away down the road he asked himself if he had gone too far. Filmer played poker very often, and he thought to himself, "I've seen her five and raised her ten! I hope to heaven she won't call me!"

Irene also was going through a rapid series of questions and answers. Filmer had simulated the outraged feelings of a gentleman admirably, and she was half convinced. Besides, there was all the difference in the world between hunting about for Gilmour's hiding-place and knowing of it for a certainty. There was danger, too, in the hunting process; considerable danger of the quarry taking to its heels in the meanwhile. Besides, again, it was Lees' or Inkerman's money that would buy Filmer's secret, and there was no need to save it for them.

Filmer meanwhile had got well down the road, and was, in fact, in an agony of chagrin and alarm as every step took him farther away from Irene and her cheque-book. The conversation had taken place on the end of the heath, and already he was walking between hedges. Another dozen strides would take him round a bend of the road, and he commenced to lag a little as he thus proceeded out of sight, and possibly out of mind, of the detective.

When he had negotiated the corner he actually stopped and looked back.

"I can apologise for speaking as I did and make up to her that way," he was telling himself, when he

heard the grind of approaching tyres and the ringing of a bell. He swung round instantly, and started walking on again at a furious pace.

Irene herself was impressed as she hurried after the retreating figure, and as she rode up to him and dismounted, her voice actually humbled itself a little.

"Say, Mr. Filmer," she called, "we're not a small boy and girl to start falling out like this over nothing. The little data I had to go by had put me in the way of thinking that you were coming from the place, but after all that's neither here nor there. What matters is, that we mustn't start falling out about trifles."

Filmer breathed once more, but the shock had taken some of the spirit out of him and he found it impossible to square up to her again.

"All right," he said, smiling. "I'm not quarrelsome, though I may be sensitive."

"After all, it's the privilege of an artist," said Irene. "But what we don't want to do is to waste time. I wired this morning for Mr. Lees to come on to Welwyn, and I expect him here now very soon. Let's fix it that we can all go on to the place where the girl is, and take her right home."

"But that's the trouble," Filmer protested. "Why should I give her up to you, when I'm not sure that my sympathies aren't very much with her?"

"Have you no sisters of your own, then, Mr. Filmer?" Irene asked.

"No."

"No wife, or a mother?"

At the word "wife" Filmer blanched perceptibly.

"But if the girl doesn't want to go home?" he asked.

Irene shook her head.

"Can you seriously believe that it is better for her to be under the protection of this stranger than under that of her own father? I have taken this case up as a matter of duty. I know something of feminine hysteria, and it makes my blood boil to see you romantic young men taking on yourselves a case which is one pre-eminently for a doctor, or at least for another woman.

"Look here," said Filmer, "you can't have your cake and eat it too. You're out for cold dollars, and it's no use talking sentiment to me. Talk business."

Irene shook her head. "That's the tragedy of you English people," she replied. "How little romance you can see in business! To an American there is a sonnet in the meanest round of a day's toil. The poetry of life, if there is any poetry in it at all, must surely be most manifest in the work of life. We cannot relegate the essentials to the scrap heap of leisure. But I suppose I must talk to you in the language you understand. How much do you want for showing me where Iris Lees is hiding?"

Filmer had had time to think it out, and he answered promptly:

"Two hundred and fifty pounds."

Irene Goldstone had been saying to herself, "Twenty-five."

"You're a humorist, Mr. Filmer," she exclaimed pleasantly.

Filmer shrugged his shoulders, for he had been getting his nerve back again after the exchange of compliments which had followed upon her overtaking him.

"I don't abate a droit," he told her. "And you very much underestimate the value of my time."

"All right," said Irene. "We will see what Mr. Lees has to say, I could not possibly undertake the payment of such a sum. Let us walk back towards Welwyn."

Filmer agreed, and they strolled back along the road, with Irene herself pushing her bicycle.

The sun had now risen to some height in an azure sky, and across the heath the air trembled liquidly.

The little detective returned to a matter that had been much annoying her.

"You rather caught me up," she said, "on the question of our relative views on plain speaking. In one sense you are right. In the pursuit of the rock-bottom sense of a thing we Americans make a point of dismissing all but the rudiments; while the English language places the complications of grammar before the facts of logic; your language is based on a tortuous and complicated obedience to syntax; ours upon a human and very sane association of ideas. Naturally, to an Englishman's confused mind, our methods of speech seem the less straightforward of the two. For instance, it may seem metaphorical to you for me to call a hand-bag a 'grip,' whereas the word 'grip' sums up in a sentence of one syllable all the essentials that you take two words and a hyphen to express. In fact you are happier if you can spin it out into a 'gladstone bag.' Now which is the real metaphor?"

Filmer was about to be beguiled into an argument when he discovered that Irene had already led him back on to the heath and was walking him off in precisely the direction which he had come from when he first met her—the direction of the cottage.

"Aren't we rather getting off the road?" he suggested.

"Let us get on to that little eminence," answered Irene, "and sit down. We can see the country from there, and keep an eye on the road as well, while we're waiting for the car."

Filmer, at a total loss to offer any reasonable objection, stopped to light himself another cigarette. It was the only means that she had left to him for gaining time.

"We'll sit on the top, certainly," he said, as he blew out the match, "if you're not afraid of adders. The place appears to be infested with them. I killed one just before you called to me."

"I wondered what you were swearing at, when you stood there looking about you," answered Irene, "but I'm proof as far as reptiles go. I've had a rattlesnake give me two warnings on the Blue Ridge mountains of Virginny. They say he rattles only once, and that those who hear him go the second time and live to say so are serpent proof, so if you don't mind yourself, Mr. Filmer, we won't trundle this foot-engine of mine any farther."

"It's turned into a 'grip,' I suppose," Filmer growled at her.

Irene walked on, and, reaching a little knoll of upland, laid down the machine and looked about her. The roof of Heath Cottage was clearly visible, and he saw her eyes rest upon it.

"We can see a great deal from here," she remarked. "And what is prettier than one of these little genuine glimpses of rural England? There's a sense of waste that's restful to the senses. Here civilisation is left behind, and we sit in the centre of a big indifference to everything. I think it's from the Britisher's regal waste of opportunity as exemplified in his countryside

that we get our idea of him as a man whose soul is large and superior. Here's a hundred acres running to waste, and only one house anywhere in sight."

"Yes, there is one house there," Filmer answered. "I lost my way a little this morning. I asked at it, and was put right."

Irene Goldstone looked sharply at him. He withdrew his eyes and she looked back towards the rooftop.

"What a pretty situation for a home," she said slowly. "What an ideal situation!"

"Wasted on an old, deaf woman," remarked Filmer. He slipped into this way of conversational invention very easily, and was careless of the humiliation of presently having to belie himself. "I should like a little cottage like that myself."

"Hullo—" he broke off suddenly. "That's the car, perhaps."

Away down the winding road skirting the heath a grey motor car was travelling towards them at a fast pace, leaving a cloud of dust behind it that rolled away across the landscape like the smoke of a wood-fire.

CHAPTER XVIII

Third Day. Fresh Interruptions—Flight and Pursuit—A Proposal and an Inspiration—The Sensible Thing—The Garden City.

GILMOUR still suffered from the pain that had swept over him as he had watched from the window. The enjoyable situation with Iris had not only been disturbed but destroyed. Obviously he could no longer regard it as a case of the strong protecting the weak, and there are few men happier than he who not only has a broad chest, but a woman weeping upon it.

He looked at Iris, and saw that it was hopeless to expect her to renew the interrupted tears. Instead, she seemed to think there was need for some formality again, for she left the window and returned to the sitting-room.

Gilmour followed her downstairs and sat in his original seat, but she merely put out the tea-cups.

"Neither of us have breakfasted," she said, "and I don't think we can talk about anything properly until we have."

Gilmour felt in a very bad humour, but after tea and buttered biscuits, and Iris having smiled again with something of her original shyness, he entered into fresh details as to what had happened in London. He had just commenced to expatiate upon the vices o'

Irene Goldstone, when there came again a knock upon the front door.

"Filmer!" said Gilmour, putting down his tea-cup.

Iris ran upstairs, and a moment later was back in the room.

"It's Mr. Filmer, yes," she exclaimed, "and my father, and Francis Bridges and two women!"

Gilmour returned with her to the upstairs window.

When he recognised in the shadow of the porch the unmistakable form of Irene Goldstone he stepped back into the room and dragged Iris with him.

"That's the woman I told you of," he whispered. "I'm afraid we're done now. Filmer's sold us."

From below came the knocking on the door again, and then a voice. It was the voice of the American detective:

"Say, Miss Lees. It's no use. Come right out and be a sensible girl."

Iris and Gilmour stared at one another.

There was another short pause, and then the voice rose again:

"Miss Lees. Don't be silly. You've nothing to be afraid of!"

Iris had put a finger to her lips, and pulled Gilmour still farther back into the room.

"Iris!" roared out the sudden voice of Henry Lees, "you'd best make no more tomfoolery of this business. I'm going to have you out, and the less fuss you make the better it'll be for you."

The two people in the room remained silent and motionless. Gilmour realised that to show himself was to definitely settle Iris and her reputation.

"She'd maybe have gone, you know," he heard Lees whisper.

"Half-an-hour ago she was there, anyway," came back Filmer's voice. "There'd be nothing easier than to get into the house and see for ourselves, though."

"How?" It was Irene speaking.

"The living-room at the back. There's nothing but those old-fashioned lead lights there."

There was another pause, and then Gilmour heard the party passing round the garden.

Advancing a step nearer to the window he looked out, and saw down in the roadway the great motor standing by the wicket gate. The engines were still running, but it stood there unattended.

"Quick," he whispered. "We'll lock the living-room door behind us. We'll gain a minute or two on them, if they get that far."

They went swiftly down the stairs and passed through the room in full view of the windows, but it was in the nick of time. As they reached the hall and closed the door behind them they heard the others.

Gilmour turned the key and looked at Iris.

"Put on that hat," he whispered peremptorily.

She obeyed, and he reached himself down an old tweed cap. Then he looked out over the glass light above the front door. The coast was perfectly clear, and at the same moment he heard a pane of glass fall, back in the living-room.

He took Iris by the arm, opened the front door, and ran with her to the gate and the road.

"The car!" exclaimed Iris, as Gilmour would have passed it.

"What?" he asked.

"I can manage it, I think. Jump in."

Iris had already sprung into the driver's place. Gilmour threw himself into the seat beside her.

The next instant and she had opened the engine and the car was moving forward.

"Are you sure?" he asked her.

"I'll get it a little way, anyhow," she answered.

Whatever speed she had set the engine at it was not a high one. The car started crawling almost, as Iris, holding the steering wheel with a grip of something very like desperation, sent it with a perilous uncertainty down the lane.

Already a babel of shouting had arisen from the cottage, and Gilmour, looking back, saw Francis Bridges racing out into the road.

"Keep her going," he called to Iris.

Bridges had spurred forward at a wild pace, and in a few seconds had almost reached them. His outstretched fingers were closing on the back of the chassis when Iris changed the gear to a reckless height. One moment later and he was falling behind again, while Lees and the two women rushed out from the cottage and up the lane.

The car itself was swaying madly about the road. A calamity of some sort seemed inevitable, but time after time, when a collision with the banks seemed a certainty, Iris brought it back to the straight again.

After five minutes of this hazardous driving they had placed almost three miles of space between themselves and the cottage, but at the sight of the first considerable bend in the lane Gilmour lost nerve.

"Pull her up," he shouted. "We've got start enough."

"I can't!" gasped the girl. "I don't know how to do it!"

Gilmour, groping with his feet, found the footbrake, and collected his wits sufficiently to apply it gently.

He felt, with unspeakable relief, that the car was grinding its way to a standstill, and as it stopped Iris pulled the lever that shut off the engines. The same movement drove the great car plunging up on the bank, where it jerked to a sudden stop, within an ace of turning turtle.

"Quick," she cried, jumping out. "Let's get on now by ourselves. I hope I'll never have to do anything like that again."

Gilmour followed her into the road, and they started on. The first gate they came to they opened, and from that moment they took to the fields.

They had half walked and half run in silence for some minutes before Gilmour spoke.

"But you couldn't drive, you know, Iris," he exclaimed abruptly.

"I don't see how you can say that!" she answered. "I didn't have an accident, and heaps of experienced chauffeurs might have had one in that horrid lane."

"You don't suggest that you have ever driven a motor car before?"

"Certainly not. Of course I haven't, but thank goodness I've kept my eyes open. All the way up from Eastbourne I was watching what the man did. Only I didn't notice the foot-brake."

She was pouting a little, looking very like a child, but suddenly they commenced to laugh, simultaneously the kind of hysterical laughter which is an iconoclastic happening, destructive of reserve.

Gilmour was unselfish enough to express the hope that the others might have a sense of humour too, but Iris assured him that the incident would be taken, by Henry Lees at least, with unalloyed gravity.

Indeed, could they have seen back along the lane at

the moment they were abandoning themselves to laughter, they would have observed their five pursuers running hot-foot and choleric.

It was only after over half-an-hour of bitter and breathless pursuing that the party found the abandoned grey car, and by that time Gilmour and Iris Lees were striding on across the meadows with recovered composure and much the appearance of a quite ordinary young couple out for a walk.

The astonishing thing to Gilmour himself was the sense of exhilaration which these experiences gave him. In reading of adventurous happenings, he had gathered that the business was "breathless" and a little exhausting. Now he felt only that he breathed more deeply, and walked more erectly, and was unusually conscious of the wind against his face and the thousand and one sensations concurrent with being properly alive.

In this manner they traversed some four miles of fields and byways, hardly discussing the actual position of affairs at all. A certain flippancy of conversation had remained after their outburst of hilarity, and they exchanged many views on life in general.

It was the first opportunity Gilmour had had of procuring any normal data whereby to judge the actual personality of the girl he was surrendering himself to.

Much of her conversation in the train when he was taking her to the cottage had alarmed him, but he now decided that the undoubted key to her character was a naturalness that made her, and would probably always keep her, refreshingly entertaining.

She appeared to have strangely escaped taking serious things with any solemnity. She was interested in many subjects, but never so earnestly that she

seemed to think they were not to be laughed at. She had read Turgenev, but preferred George Moore. She was not even superstitious about Bernard Shaw.

Gilmour, carried into this new atmosphere, suddenly asked himself why this girl of all girls was foolish enough to go to Childrey Street, and remain there; to need anybody's taking away and anybody's protection. All he had seen of her suggested she was perfectly able to take care of herself; why, for instance, had she not broken the window of the room she was locked in, and shouted for help?

He asked her the question.

"If you had seen the sort of men who worked in the mews at the back, you'd understand," she answered him. "I did actually begin to do it the first morning. I opened the window, but when I saw them putting down their prongs and things to stare up at me, I simply shut the window down again. I couldn't somehow. It wasn't as if I had been hurled into the room and the door locked on me. Then I might have sprung to the window and shouted, but you can't do those sort of things in cold blood."

"But afterwards, when I took you away. Suppose you had insisted on my simply going with you to Brentford?"

"Well, that *was* where we went wrong, I suppose," she answered frankly. "I was only afraid of being horribly grumbled at, and my idea at the moment was to get you to take me anywhere and then to go off and do what I could for myself. But then, if you look back, circumstances seemed to slide us along into doing what we did. It seemed quite sensible for you to put me somewhere while you went and saw what you could do, and then all this happened. We certainly

have to run away now, anyway, if it's only for stealing the motor car."

Gilmour switched his thoughts off to the position of Lees and his conspiracy, and asked himself, in the light of the everyday-looking world about them, if all of it was not some chimera of his imagination.

"But people are so stupid," Iris said abruptly, as if he had spoken aloud. "This is just what does happen. I daresay it seems quite sensible to them. They probably thought it a perfectly brilliant idea to marry me to the chauffeur. Just the idea of the two names, and all the evidence happening to fit, appealed to them. They're all bullies and the sort of people who don't consider that women really count at all, so they thought that it was quite a good way out. They mightn't have even thought it at all wrong to me. It's turned into something rather serious now, though, hasn't it? We've got to go on running away now, till we can do something else."

"Would you marry me?" Gilmour asked, so abruptly that Iris stopped short and began to laugh again.

Gilmour was annoyed. He had asked the question quite earnestly.

"It's the parental consent," explained Iris, with a sudden seriousness. "People simply can't marry without it. I discovered that in a book on one of your own shelves. People under twenty-one have to get their father's signature. If you pretend you've got it when you haven't you lay yourself open to the penalties of perjury, and you know Mr. Lees would never think of consenting. It means waiting three or four years before we could dream of it."

Gilmour groaned, and then an inspiration came to him.

"But Lees isn't your father," he exclaimed. "Your father is the boatman on the loch in Scotland. He's the one to get the consent from. Lees has nothing to do with it."

Iris herself was fired at once with obvious enthusiasm.

"It's a simply miraculous way out of a simply impossible situation," she agreed.

They laughed again, excitedly, over so splendid a discovery, but difficulties were not long in presenting themselves.

Who was her father, for instance? What was his name even? And was he even alive?

Iris went over all her store of memories on the point of identification, but they were very few.

She knew that she was four years old at the time of her adoption, so that it must have happened some thirteen or fourteen years before. She had an idea, too, that there had been some sort of an accident on the lake, and that her father had had a wooden leg, or would have to have one. She wasn't sure which. It was only when she was very little that these things had been mentioned in front of her. When she had reached whatever age it was that the Lees' associated with her "noticing things" these occasional references to her origin ceased.

She remembered, though, that Mrs. Lees had one day quoted Wordsworth, and then stopped suddenly. It was something about seven, Iris explained. She had guessed that the lines in some way concerned herself and had read much of Wordsworth to find it out, but without success. There was certainly nothing in "We are seven."

Gilmour commenced to quote at once:

"Sweet Highland Girl, a very shower
Of beauty is thy earthly dower!
Twice seven consenting years have shed—"

"That's the poem!" cried Iris at once. "How very clever of you!"

"It was written," said Gilmour, "at Inversnaid, on Loch Lomond. I remembered it because it was quoted in a guide-book on the lakes of Scotland that I was reading once. I should say that we've got a clue."

They walked on, immensely enlivened, and striking, soon after this, the main road, found themselves on the unmistakable outskirts of a country town.

"We're coming into Hitchin, I should think," said Gilmour, "though I've never been there. It may be rather dangerous to leave the fields."

Iris recommended that they should avoid the town, though she agreed that they must get somewhere. They crossed more fields and, skirting the houses, continued to travel north.

"Have you enough money for us both to go to Scotland?" she asked abruptly, and Gilmour, emptying his purse, found that some seven sovereigns and two five-pound notes was the amount of his cash. It was not money that was likely to be the difficulty, though. It was Iris herself.

"I quite agree with you," said Iris suddenly, although he had not spoken aloud. "I know what you're thinking—or what you ought to be, anyway—and I don't see myself how I could possibly go with you. The sensible thing is for you just to take a room for me somewhere and leave me there while you go north as quickly as you can."

"That would be all very well," said Gilmour, "if there was no danger of discovery. Someone might happen to recognise you and write to Lees, or even to the police. I can't see how you can be safe."

They were sitting on a stile on a high field overlooking the town of Hitchin, for they had stopped to consider this question of a lodging.

"If," said Iris, "we could only think of some place where they don't have newspapers. It's very difficult. The most remote cottage would be the very sort of house to find one in."


Gilmour suggested the Letchworth Garden City, which was not so many miles beyond where they were sitting. He had heard that an abnormal sort of people lived there.

Iris was delighted. She agreed that no spot could be safer, and that, moreover, it was a place that made some sort of disguise quite an easy matter.

"If we were to walk into there without shoes or stockings or hats, carrying boughs of some tree with us, no one would notice us at all," she exclaimed, "and then we might simply explain that I was a member of some communistic sisterhood, seeking hospitality, and you might even be able to leave me for nothing. I'm sure we could do it."

They had passed Baldock and could already see the red and white outpost cottages of the "City" when they paused again under a spreading hedgerow to make their final arrangements. First of all Iris let down her hair and made childish plaits of it, which she looped again about her head. Then she removed a "Peter Pan" collar from her blouse, so that her throat was bared, and finally she took off her shoes and stockings. Gilmour did not make these drastic

changes in his appearance. He pocketed his cap, took off the starched linen collar which he was wearing and substituted the cravat alone. Then Iris gathered green sprigs from the hedge and they walked on.



CHAPTER XIX

Still the Third Day. The Pursuing Party reinforced—Mrs. Filmer and an Ultimatum—*The Evening Flash* is presented with a "good Story."

THE car having been abandoned with the front wheels well up on the bank, it seemed when Mr. Lees' party arrived that the cause of its having been left was an inability to drive it. Irene had left her bicycle on the heath, and Miss Silby hers at Welwyn. Now they all five boarded the car and started off in pursuit.

Travelling at top speed they had soon examined the road for five miles ahead. When this revealed no sign of the fugitives they returned to the spot where they had started from and consulted again.

Whatever the disgust of the others, Filmer was quite satisfied. He had accepted one hundred pounds as the price of his secret, and an open cheque was in his pocket. With Gilmour's cheque he was getting on well, he told himself.

The attitude of Irene Goldstone was also, for the moment at least, hopeful. The two young people had but a small start, and among the five of them it should not be a very difficult matter to locate the quarry. She sent Lees and Bridges on again with instructions to patrol the roads, and return at intervals to the starting-point, while she, Filmer and her

lieutenant started to scour the fields in separate directions.

It was not a plan that Filmer particularly approved of—his chief concern now was to keep out of Gilmour's way, unless he found himself very well reinforced. For this reason, when he had disappeared over the nearest gate, to cover the ground Irene had allotted to him, he merely sat in the hedge.

After a wait of half-an-hour, during which he kept a cautious watch through the brambles, he heard Miss Goldstone calling from the road, and made his way back to the place with all the air of a man who had exhausted himself by activity.

His first misgiving was when he saw a woman's bonnet over the hedge by the roadside. Irene Goldstone herself was walking towards him, and she met him while she was still in the field.

"No luck?" she asked. She saw Filmer shake his head, and went on at once: "I went back in the car to fetch my machine, and who do you think we struck?"

Filmer had already guessed, to judge by his countenance.

"Your good wife, Mr. Filmer. She happened to come down, looking into matters a little on her own account, I suppose, and we ran into her."

"Really?" asked Filmer quickly.

"Well, metaphorically," answered Irene, trying to speak with some sympathy. "I must be candid, Mr. Filmer," she went on, in a quick whisper. "This lady is going to be one too many unless we satisfy her. I have taken the liberty of telling her that you came here by appointment, to put us in the way of

finding Iris Lees. It seems to have quite satisfied her, so if you'll just remember that you came down with me."

"How and when?" Filmer asked anxiously.

"By car. Fortunately, I'd not found my machine, so that we must leave it where it is for the moment. I've managed to tell the others."

Filmer was immeasurably relieved. He had flattered himself that he had allayed his wife's worst suspicions by a night of reckless mendacity, and was grateful to the little detective for her assistance now, whatever her motives.

He went with her to the car and found himself being anxiously looked out for.

"Well, Lloyd," Mrs. Filmer exclaimed, "you've rather forced me to appear sentimental, hunting you up like this, but I was really afraid for you."

She turned round to the others.

"My husband very considerably concealed from me his intentions, in coming down here to-day, but I guessed them. I didn't like the look of Mr. Gilmour at all, when I happened to see him last evening. There was something desperate in his eye, and I didn't know what might happen. A woman can't do much in a time of danger, it's true, but we've all got a little of the amazon in us."

She looked at Francis Bridges, smiling, for she had been introduced to him and was impressed. Then she leaned out of the car and patted her husband's shoulder.

"Well," drawled out Irene, "I'm afraid we've lost scent for the moment, and now there's only one thing to do. We must get back to that cottage and round up clues."

Everyone took a place in the car, and this strange party went back to the deserted cottage. A labourer passed them on the road and thought to himself what a fine time the gentry had scouring the country in this fashion.

Francis Bridges, however, was humiliated by this exhibition of six persons in one car, and it did not improve his temper. Filmer himself had lost any confidence as to his wife's state of mind long before the cottage was reached, for on the excuse of holding his arm she subjected him to a vice-like grip of her fingers that he knew to be a gentle harbinger of griefs to come.

It was exactly a quarter to twelve when all the six people trooped into the cottage, though Bridges took the precaution this time of putting his car out of gear, and within the dining-room Miss Silby set about finding cups and saucers and putting a kettle on an oil stove which she discovered with a view to brewing a cup of tea.

It was a curious fact that the local policeman walked by the cottage at the same time without the ghost of a suspicion that anything unusual was happening.

Even if he had looked inside he would only have seen a very ordinary-looking tea-party. Mrs. Filmer was seated comfortably in an arm-chair with her veil turned up, Lees was smoking a cigar and looking morosely out of the window, Bridges was examining a motor map to escape being spoken to, and Filmer and Miss Goldstone were trying to keep the party bright. It was Miss Silby who presently beckoned her chief into the kitchen and ventured the comment that Mrs. Filmer was very likely to transfer her suspicions from

Iris Lees to Irene herself if the latter was not very careful.

Miss Goldstone was quite taken aback.

"It's just one of those simple things it's so easy to overlook," she commented. "You didn't speak any too soon, Miss Silby."

Irene perceived that her friend had indeed not, for on her return to the table she found Mrs. Filmer's eyes waiting for her. Filmer had not guessed at the new danger, but he was dreading the hour when he should find himself alone with his wife.

Miss Silby brought in a tray of tea-things with business-like alacrity within a very few minutes of the house having been entered, and while Mr. Lees and Mrs. Filmer sipped tea and Francis Bridges still studied his road-map, Irene walked around with a cup in her hand and investigated the premises.

In the pocket of an overcoat in the hall she found a leathern flying-cap, and it irritated her. Then Bridges strolled out to her for a muttered conversation.

"You must get that lady off our hands," he demanded, "and that husband, or whatever he is, of hers."

"Take them back to town," said Irene. "I want a quiet hour or two here alone, and if you and Mr. Lees will run them into London you can be back soon after three."

Filmer heard his doom with manifest depression: Mr. Lees had an appointment in town. Mr. Bridges was going to drive him there and offered his services to Mrs. Filmer.

Mrs. Filmer accepted the invitation with pleasure, and at half-past twelve she led her husband out to the car. The party drove off, leaving Irene going

systematically through the house and Miss Silby pasting paper over the broken window-panes.

To Filmer it was a meteoric journey, and the inexorable manner in which the ground was covered in spite of his earnest prayers for an accident aroused a sickening sensation of impotency.

Mrs. Filmer had asked to be dropped at Waterloo Station. That meant Hazelmere, and her husband groaned almost aloud. Besides, there was Lees' open cheque in his pocket and no chance now of cashing it before the bank closed.

He had said good-bye to Irene with all the feelings of a drowning man who loses his grip upon a straw, and he sat back in the car with his wife sentimentally holding his hand.

Outwardly she seemed very pleasant indeed, but no sooner had they alighted from the grey car and bade farewell to its occupants than she led her husband through the station entrance and down to the furthest end of a deserted platform.

"Lloyd," she began, "I am not going to let myself go here, because I should scream, but you will tell me the truth as to why you went to Hertfordshire this morning."

She had already raised her voice considerably, and Filmer was looking about him in an agony of alarm.

"I went simply to put myself right with you," he answered. "In my insane desire to help Gilmour I ran a considerable risk, and afterwards, in the calm, clear light of reason, I saw that I had done wrong. I went to right that wrong—to deliver up that girl to her lawful guardians."

"You swear that you were not a party to her disappearance?"

"Absolutely."

"Then," said Mrs. Filmer, "you will get with me into the first taxi-cab, drive straight to the offices of an evening paper and place the whole of this story in the hands of the editor."

"But why on earth?" expostulated Filmer.

"It is the only possible way," said his wife slowly, "by which you can convince me that you yourself are not hiding that girl somewhere."

Filmer argued and struggled against this ultimatum, but his wife was adamant. He could choose between the taxi-cab to Fleet Street and the train to Hazelmere; her terms and peace, a refusal of her terms and——

Filmer consented.

The hands of the station clock pointed to a few minutes before two, and he asked himself if there was any chance of his escaping his wife in time to cash his cheque. Absolute secrecy had been the bargain between himself and Lees, and for the moment at least he could do nothing.

"You do it cheerfully, now?" asked Mrs. Filmer warningly.

"Very cheerfully, since it is to please you," he answered grimly.

They entered a taxi-cab, and to add to his feelings they passed the very bank itself on which his cheque was drawn, but it was more than his nerve would rise to make any effort to do his business there.

Mrs. Filmer had pitched upon *The Evening Flash* to be the recipient of her gift of news, and had told the driver to "find the offices."

The premises of *The Evening Flash* are situated not far from Fleet Street, and Mrs. Filmer, when they had duly drawn up at the door, was for walking straightway

into the editor's room. The formality of filling in a slip of paper and explaining her business annoyed her, but after a long and fruitless wrangle with the hall-porter she at last surrendered with the proviso that she would report him. The document was made out as follows :—

“Visitor . . . Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd Filmer.

To See The Editor.

Business : A fresh development of the Pimlico Abduction Case.”

They took their seat in a waiting-room and very soon a small page-boy came to them.

“Lady and gentleman to see the editor, please.”

A lift conducted them skyward, and landed them somewhere where a second little boy took them in charge and, guiding them through a labyrinth of corridors, finally ushered them into a small room fragrant with the odour of much tobacco.

A very young man, very elaborately dressed, put down a cigarette. Filmer would have done the talking, but his wife advanced to the young man's desk and even shut out any view that Filmer might have had of him.

“Are you the editor?”

“I'm one of the news editors,” the young man answered a little irritably. “You can't see anyone else.”

“Well, you might be interested to hear that private detectives have discovered Iris Lees at a cottage in Hertfordshire, where she was in hiding with Robert Gilmour, who was discharged yesterday from Dorchester Row.”

“Ah,” said the young man, in a new voice. “One moment, please.” He looked pleased as he telephoned

a message from his desk. Then he turned back to them.

"I've sent for one of our outside men. You've not brought any photographs yourself, I suppose."

"No," said Filmer, from behind his wife.

The idea of Lloyd Filmer taking photographs for a halfpenny newspaper amused him.

Mrs. Filmer entered into a rambling relation of the morning's happenings, and it was very evident that here was what a newspaper man will call a "good story."

When the second young man came into the office the first young man showed them all into another room, and there left them. It was a quarter of an hour later that Mr. and Mrs. Filmer found themselves in the street again, with a written agreement in the latter's pocket to the effect that, whatever the outcome of their information, their own names were not to be revealed under any circumstances whatever.

Filmer tried hard to get to the bank, but it was impossible, and at half-past two he found himself steaming out of Waterloo Station with his wife, on his way to Hazelmere.

At about the same moment two motor cars were heading northward out of London. One was a large grey car bearing three gentlemen, the other carried two young men besides a chauffeur, and one of the young men carried the essential apparatus for taking instantaneous photographs.

CHAPTER XX

Still the Third Day. Arrival at Mecca—A Stranger introduced—Art at Home—Iris and the Summer-House—Gilmour says Good-bye.

MEANWHILE Gilmour and Iris Lees were entering the Garden City.

To Iris, this first visit to a place so intimately associated in spirit with much that she had read partook of the nature almost of a journey to Mecca, and she explained her sensations.

"Isn't it exactly like one's dreams of it!" she exclaimed enthusiastically, as they arrived outside the first of the little rough-cast houses.

Gilmour had never dreamt of the Garden City, and he told her so.

Iris had not either, but she had often thought of it, she told him. It seemed to her such a clever line of least resistance; to get the country without having to come into contact with country people. Of course, she said, one couldn't take life seriously in it, which would be quite nice as long as one wasn't ill or worried. She clearly thought of it as a place to play, rather than to live in. She looked eagerly for a sun-dial and, soon finding one, was entranced.

"I suppose quite grown-up people make those absurd, darling little gardens," she exclaimed.

"You'll get overheard, you know," Gilmour warned

her, and at the same moment an angry-looking bearded face peered at them from over the garden hedge.

They hurried on, and although Iris did not commune aloud again it was very clear that the place entirely fascinated her.

"Yet it's not exactly like I thought it would be, after all," she confessed presently. "We've passed several people and they seem to resent us, although I'm dressed like this. I haven't seen the sort of person that I could possibly ask to stay with yet."

"I think if we walk about," said Gilmour, "we may strike somebody. Or there's almost sure to be some sort of a boarding-house here. Here's a postman. We'll ask him."

They inquired for rooms of the man, but he said he'd never heard of any. There'd be plenty at Baldock, he told them. "Or there's one or two sort of asylums here," he added, as an afterthought. "Sort of rest-cure places."

They left him and strolled on rather disconsolately, and arriving presently at the village hostelry entered and demanded refreshments. Here they somewhat forgot their troubles over a welcome repast of lemonade and bread and cheese. It was a temperance house, but built somewhat in imitation of a licensed inn, and it was while they were here that an elderly man came in and called for a "dry ginger," which he drank at the counter.

Iris sat at a bench with her bare feet tucked away under her dress. The stranger more than once looked towards her and Gilmour, and at last, with some hesitation, he spoke.

"Walked over to see the Garden City, I suppose, sir?"

"We just strolled into it," Gilmour answered.

"And what do you think of it?"

The question was asked in a way that conveyed no hint of the speaker's own opinion, yet there was something earnest and solicitous about his facial expression that suggested that he held some strong opinion on either one side or the other. He was dressed decidedly as if his prejudice was in favour of the place, for he wore the regulation beard, tweed clothes and soft felt hat of the conscious-intellectual, but the face itself did not suggest the thinker, or even the inquiring mind. It was a rather bluff-looking face. Gilmour noted, too, that the hands were large and shapeless, as though they had been disfigured at some period by excessive work.

Before Gilmour could speak, Iris had herself answered the question, quickly, as though she had summed up the stranger and was anxious that his feelings should not be hurt by the wrong answer.

"It's very pleasant," she said, "but it seems to lack something to make it substantial. I don't know what it is, but it lacks something."

The man put down his glass and regarded her steadily.

"You think so, too, do you?" he said slowly.

Gilmour wondered who this man, whose manner had become strangely wistful, might be. What was his occupation? What was he doing at all at Letchworth? He was an enigmatic-looking person altogether. Coarse though his hands were, they showed no signs of recent work, and there was a general neatness about his appearance that suggested that he was "retired." His voice suggested nothing. It was neither educated nor uneducated. It vaguely suggested Lees himself,

and he might have been a man of the same class: an agent, perhaps, acclimatised in the matter of dress to the Garden City.

He was certainly a talkative man; and such may usually be questioned without offence.

"Do you live here?" Gilmour asked him.

He nodded his head slowly.

"I couldn't tell you half," he said, and called for his glass to be filled again. "My lips are sealed, so to speak. I've had two years here, just two years. More than that I can't say."

Iris was looking at him with open sympathy, as if she would have given much to have learned his secret trouble. That he had one was quite obvious. Gilmour himself had been thinking of the postman's allusion to "rest-homes," and he made a cautious inquiry.

"You live alone, perhaps?"

The man smiled and emptied his sparkling glass before he answered.

"Far from it, sir," he exclaimed. "I live with my mother and my seven grandsons. If I lived alone here, I don't know what would happen to me. I suppose I should go away."

"It's London that you miss, perhaps," said Gilmour. "You were born in London, perhaps, and, like most Londoners, love the place at heart."

"Where I was born, sir," the man answered, "is a sealed book, and I can say no more. Not that I mean to be uncivil at all, but there are some questions that I can't very well answer. But I don't mind telling you that my name is Martin—Joseph Martin. My son, Allan Martin, is the well-known architect of that name, sir, the designer of half the Garden City cottages in Great Britain."

"Oh," said Gilmour.

The other looked at him, quickly and a little anxiously.

"You know the name, don't you?"

Iris answered for Gilmour again.

"Everybody has heard of Allan Martin," she exclaimed enthusiastically. "Only a few months ago there were several pages of illustrations of his designs for Art Homes in *The Studio*. I admired them immensely."

Mr. Joseph Martin was clearly very gratified. He looked into his pockets and brought out the folded leaves of the very illustrations in question. It was quite clear that he followed his son's career with much pride.

Mr. Joseph Martin was, in fact, so delighted with the compliment that he placed down his glass and bluntly asked if the young lady and her friend would not accompany him to his home, and see with their own eyes the seven sons of the distinguished Allan.

Gilmour and Iris were equally delighted. They brushed away their crumbs and prepared to accompany their new friend, but not until after Iris had found an opportunity to replace her shoes and stockings.

Out in the broad sunny road they found Mr. Martin an even shorter and stouter man than they had imagined within the hostel, and as he led the way down the village main street he made a queer figure in his odd-looking garments; odd-looking because they seemed so entirely unsuitable.

"Your son is not at home just now, then?" Iris asked. "Only the little boys?"

"We don't see him—at least hardly ever," Mr. Martin replied. "He has a house in London, and country places too, but he and his wife are very willing

to leave the children with us. They just send them, one by one, soon after they're old enough to leave the mother. They're not fond of children, but they say it's a duty to the State."

"I wonder you live at Letchworth, then," said Gilmour, and Mr. Martin shrugged his shoulders.

"Allan wants them brought up in what he calls the right atmosphere. And it's his own house we're in. He wants them brought up this sort of way."

As he spoke there was a kind of war-whoop uttered from somewhere across a piece of waste land and a little troop of boys came racing towards them. They looked very normal children in spite of the fact that they wore little Roman togas. Iris kissed the smallest boy at once, and they proceeded on their way until they had reached what seemed to be an old Elizabethan farmhouse, lying back in a small field.

"Even a modern architect prefers an old building for himself, then," Gilmour remarked as they neared this distinctly picturesque edifice by way of an old, worm-eaten stile.

But Mr. Martin shook his head. "Not a brick of it standing two and a half years ago," he answered. "And, not a thing that's in it made five years ago, if you don't count the growth of the wood. There's no one can fake like my boy can. Just wait till you see the inside."

The little boys had run on ahead, and now there appeared in the porchway, where the very cobblestones seemed to have been worn deep by the tread of ages, a little old lady, who at least was no illusion, and who gave to the place an air of genuine senility. She was, in fact, an altogether unforgettable picture, standing there in her knitted cap, with an ample white apron about a dress of lavender-coloured silk.

Mr. Martin explained, with a shout into her ear, that he had brought friends, and the old soul actually dropped a curtsy, though it was plain that her son frowned upon her for doing so. She was quite deaf, and did not speak to the visitors at all.

In the living-room of the house Gilmour and Iris were given seats, while the old lady herself went to the chimney-corner, where she spread her hands out upon her lap and gazed listlessly but very contentedly about her. Mr. Martin did most of the talking.

The room itself, however, was an instructive conversation. Nothing that could enhance its old-world charm seemed missing. The beam that traversed the smoke-grimed ceiling was black and gnarled-looking, while a dummy fitch of bacon was fastened near it. There was a blunderbuss over the mantelshelf, and quaint ornaments everywhere. The indisputable fact was that it all seemed entirely genuine. There was even a slight muddle, as if everything had its serious use and was in constant employment.

"You see it's healthy," said Mr. Martin.

"Hygienic," put in one of the older of the little boys.

"It's healthier than so much of this old stuff about a place," said Mr. Martin. "It's one of the sights of Letchworth, of course. If it was anywhere else it would take anybody in."

"It has me," said Iris. "But best of all are your darling little boys. I shall quite feel it when I have to tear myself away," and she glanced at Gilmour.

Mr. Martin looked at her with a new expression of interest, then he spoke :

"I only wish," he said, "that I could find a young lady such as yourself who would like to make her home here with us. It's what my son wishes to find: some-

body who will look after the children and take an interest in them, for my old mother is getting past it. I suppose I couldn't hope—"

Gilmour and Iris commenced to speak together. They stopped simultaneously, after they had unmistakably conveyed approval.

"I've taken to her," said the architect's curious father bluntly. "I've taken to her, and nothing would please me more than for her to stay here." He stopped, and looked at Gilmour, as though he hesitated to add that the young lady was the limit of his interest.

"I'm going a little farther up the country myself," Gilmour said quickly. "If we could fix this matter and I could leave my friend here for the moment, anyway, I should be delighted. My name is Green, and my friend's name is——"

Iris took the words out of his mouth.

"Fanny Smith," she said quickly. "I hope you think it's a pretty one."

Mr. Martin did not give any opinion upon the name, but he very loudly communicated the gist of the matter to his aged mother, who motioned a response on her fingers.

"She's very pleased," explained Mr. Martin, "so I don't see why we shouldn't take it as settled."

Gilmour was awaiting the blow to fall when some sort of reference should be asked for, but it did not happen. Mr. Martin appeared to be a person who could not ask business-like questions for fear of appearing uncivil.

"But is there nothing for me to pay at all?" Iris asked him.

"Is there nothing for me?" asked Mr. Martin.

This appeared to be the settlement, and Gilmour,

seeing a Great Northern time-table, said that he would look up his train and get off.

"There's a summer-house outside, you know," chuckled Mr. Martin with a sudden lapse into apparent irrelevance.

Iris looked at him almost indignantly. Then taking Gilmour by the sleeve she led him off so that they disappeared into the garden.

"Why did you mind his saying that?" asked Gilmour anxiously.

"Perhaps it was because I don't much like him," Iris answered.

They found the summer-house. It stood on mushroom-shaped stones, and they went up into it, the time-table tucked under Gilmour's arm.

"No, don't close the door, please," said Iris, "but sit down and let us look up the trains sensibly."

"Do you know," said Gilmour, "that I'm beginning to feel that I can't go away from you—even for forty-eight hours?"

"But you must find my father if we're to straighten things out at all," she replied, almost nervously.

"All right," exclaimed Gilmour, and they spread the time-table out before them.

"But what are you going to say?" she asked him "if you do find him. You can't very well walk into a man's house and simply say, 'I want your consent to marry the daughter you gave away to somebody fourteen years ago. Please sign this!'"

"That reminds me," said Gilmour, "I must get him to sign something."

Outside, one of the little boys had arrived, and now his six brothers severally joined him, so that they stood in a solemn ring about the arbour.

They attended to the trains, then, and also Iris propounded a scheme for remaining within the garden of Mr. Martin's house. She would initiate the boys into a game which she had already thought of, and which would keep them happily confined to the premises. It would be a game of Romulus and Remus building a Roman Garden Suburb. For three days at least she would guarantee to keep herself concealed.

Half-an-hour later Gilmour presented her with one of his five-pound notes, bade her farewell, and walked, accompanied by Mr. Martin, to Letchworth station.

CHAPTER XXI

The Third Day (last quarter). At the Registrar's—Gilmour finds himself ahead of London news. *The Fourth Day opens.*

GILMOUR travelled back to London, and Mr. Martin saw him off at the railway station, reiterating assurances that Miss Smith was going to be treated precisely like his own daughter.

London was certainly a danger zone to be entering, but Gilmour felt fairly sure that even in the highly improbable event of Lees' having gone to the police again, there could hardly be a development so soon. Nevertheless it was with some trepidation that he bought an evening paper when he reached King's Cross. But there was no reference to the case in it, and his next concern was to find the quickest route to his destination.

He had gone to London to catch a train that would leave King's Cross for Balloch, on the banks of Loch Lomond, at seven o'clock, but the time was then only a little after five, and he chafed at so long a wait. An alternative route was Euston to Glasgow, and from thence a local train to Balloch, and accordingly he went on to Euston and inquired about trains there, finding, as luck would have it, that there was an excursion leaving at six, due to reach Glasgow at five the next morning. There was little gained in actual time,

but he was already desperately uneasy, and he promptly reserved a seat. Then he went out into the Euston Road, discovered a registry office, and requested to be told what happened when one got married.

It was this undertaking that brought home with sudden, overwhelming vividness how utterly strange was all this mad march of events.

It was still only three days ago that he was living a perfectly ordinary existence with no shadow of this thing in view. Now he found himself with his elbows on the counter of a registrar's office, calmly interviewing a young man who recited a number of official facts, and finally handed him an official form which, he said, had to be signed by the consenting guardian of a minor.

Gilmour inquired how long it took to marry.

"There must be fifteen days' residence in the district wherein the marriage takes place," he was informed.

"Fifteen days' residence," he murmured, as he hurried out into the street and hailed a passing taxicab. There was just time to perform another important operation, and he directed his driver to his tailor's in the Haymarket, where he proposed cashing a cheque. He resumed his reflection as the cab moved off.

"Fifteen days' residence!" If things went on in this fashion there seemed small likelihood of his getting two nights' rest in the same place. Looking back over the week he saw Monday night spent wakefully over the discovered letter, Tuesday night in a cell at Dorchester Row, the previous night at the Hotel Metropole, and now he was going to have an all-night train journey. Iris had divided her time during the last few days between Eastbourne, Childrey Street, the cottage on the heath, and now the Letchworth Garden City.

But the cab had already drawn up at his tailor's, and he entered the shop. Here he cashed a cheque for twenty pounds.

This was an incident that sent the tailor high up in his estimation, for he behaved with that charm of manner which is the prerogative of the tradesman, and succeeded in making his customer believe that the story of the Pimlico Outrage had never reached his ears. From the Haymarket he raced back to Euston and secured his seat at the very moment that the train commenced to steam out of the station.

It was now that an utterly confounding thing happened, for just as his carriage passed the bookstall he saw a man there fastening up an evening paper bill, and read in great black letters :

“ ABDUCTION CASE STARTLING NEWS ”

The next moment and they were steaming out through the labyrinth of lines and signal boxes beyond the station.

Gilmour had thrust his head out of the carriage window, and on the impulse of the moment had turned the handle, so that he held himself only by his left hand clutching the woodwork.

“ You can't get out ! ” exclaimed an elderly passenger sitting opposite to him, firmly turning the handle back again.

Gilmour sat down in his seat, and the speaker watched him with great irritation.

“ A foolish thing to do,” he growled. “ You might have broken your neck.”

Gilmour groped helplessly for an answer, and a rather more amiable-looking man sitting beside him inquired if he had forgotten something.

"No, I hadn't," he answered.

"Saw someone, perhaps?" asked the irritable passenger.

"Yes," said Gilmour.

It was necessary that he should give his thoughts to what had happened, but now a third passenger entered into an elaborate account of a fatal accident which he had once witnessed, and which had happened in precisely the same way. Gilmour's taciturnity, however, soon led to silence, and he stared out of the window.

What had happened? What did this thing mean? What was this news that had reached Euston Station at the same moment that he was leaving it? He realized that unless he could find the answer on the train he must wait hours before learning it.

There would be a stop at Rugby in about two hours' time, but it was certain that the train would remain ahead of the news until there had been time for it to get published in some northern evening newspaper. And by then the bookstalls would be closed and he would learn nothing.

An overwhelming desire seized him to get out of the train, at any cost to leave it; a sense of sheer mental and physical incapacity to remain in it.

But, as in the cell at Dorchester Row, he realized that such sensations had to be mastered, and he folded his arms and for some minutes looked quietly out of the window.

But his thoughts went back to the origin of this new shock, and the same insane desire to get out on to the line swept over him again.

Then suddenly he found complete relief. He recollected that all he had to do was to pull the communication cord, and the train would stop. The nightmare was gone at once.

And there was a fortunate side to the happening. How well it was that he was getting out of London ahead of the news, and not an hour or so behind it.

It might well be that he was getting the best of his persecutors again.

All the time the annoyed-looking fellow-passenger was watching him suspiciously, but the furtive look quickly disappeared when Gilmour smiled into his face and remarked that he really couldn't understand how he could have made that dash for the window, and that he was much obliged to him for having closed the door again.

All the passengers began to talk cheerfully once more, and Gilmour asked presently if anyone had a late paper. Several were forthcoming, but he found no reference in any of them to the news he sought.

He could not very well perambulate the corridors in search of late evening papers, and presently he lay back with his eyes half closed and his arms folded.

It was useless worrying himself any more about this sudden riddle. The train was rushing on and he must go with it. But whatever it was, he told himself, there was no great need to feel alarm for Iris. He had given up regarding her as a fragile bloom. She was a very strong-minded young woman, quite able to take care of herself.

He remembered her explanation of the whole business—shearing it even of any romance or him of much chivalry. They had simply slid into it. She couldn't shout in cold blood to the men in the mews, and the

whole thing had just happened step by step, quite naturally. It was sane reasoning, and he supposed they must go on in this way until they reached some sort of a finish. Whatever this news was, the only danger to Iris herself was Lees' initial right as parent, and he was on his way now to try and smash that. No step could equal that one in importance, and nothing should prevent him going through with it. Produce a new parent and probably the whole case would automatically collapse.

Gilmour's mind was, in reality, a well-balanced one. He could do nothing at present, and that was all about it, and now when the steward came through the train in search of diners he surrendered himself to his appetite, and went through to the dining-car. Here, under the influence of long privation, he made an altogether hearty meal, and finished it just as the train drew into Rugby station.

But, as he had expected, a search of the bookstall revealed nothing of the mystery. The London papers were all early editions, and the local ones made no new reference to the "Outrage."

And then followed another weary spell, which he whiled away by conversing small-talk with his fellow-passengers, and at Crewe he sallied forth again. It was his last chance for the night, for the next stop was at Lancaster at nearly midnight. He found the bookstall closed, but a boy was selling papers on the platform. He purchased two different local ones, and carried them back with him to his compartment.

"STRANGE ABDUCTION CASE"

he read.

But it was in very small type, and not an inch of it at the bottom of the column.

“Private detectives have traced the missing girl, Iris Lees, to a lonely cottage in Hertfordshire, which the discharged man, Gilmour, has apparently been renting for some time in the name of ‘Jones.’ Both were there, but fled, and interesting developments are expected.

Exactly the same account was in the second paper, though it was given more prominence.

Gilmour read and re-read this brief announcement, feeling fresh disgust at its inadequacy. Another odd thing that he felt was a faint resentment at the unimportant manner in which it was recorded. He realised this himself, and laughed.

One thing seemed clear, however, from this disappointing report. It was that it was not yet another police matter, but, apparently, a reckless step of Lees’ own. There was every likelihood that the officials would not particularly interest themselves in a case that had been taken up by “private detectives,” but it might mean that Iris would be tracked down.

He could learn no more now, however, and again he dismissed the matter and made himself as comfortable as he could for the night. The carriage had become much less crowded, and very soon he was fast asleep, nor did he properly awaken until, at three o’clock in the morning, he found the train running into Carlisle in the gloom of impending morning.

He was always romantic enough to enjoy these moments, and he stretched his legs on the bleak, stone

station and enjoyed sundry cups of hot tea, while the sky paled and reddened over the border city, and the strange formality of exchanging English for Scotch engines was gone through. When they started again it was in the warm glow of a perfect summer's dawn, and he enjoyed from the window the fleeting glimpses of Gretna and the pleasant thrill of crossing the border.

He was wide awake now, but he did not dwell much on the situation. It was necessary to keep Iris out of his head, if he was to have a clear brain to work with. Not until the morning and the Glasgow papers could he learn definitely what had happened, or how he stood.

He slept again and awoke a little before they entered upon the suburbs of the Scottish city.

Glasgow in the morning! Gilmour, as an Englishman, and one who only knew his southern counties intimately, blinked his eyes with amazement when he crawled, cramped and stiff from the train, and made his way out of the station in search of newspapers.

It was not quite seven o'clock, but the sun was shining brightly, a clear, cold air was blowing, and he found himself out in a fine wide street where the most astonishing medley of people he had ever seen trooped by on their way to work. He saw bare-footed women and half-naked children; he saw men and boys reeling along as if either drunk or suffering from the immediate after-effects. He saw hideously blotched and inflamed faces, dirty and emaciated faces, faces everywhere denoting physical wreckage, and yet Glasgow seemed a fine, bright, clean city. He asked himself if this was England! and then reflected with some satisfaction that no, it was Scotland.

He bought his papers from a man under the station

walls and hurried back with them into the sanctuary of the refreshment-room, and called for tea.

In one paper he found the case set out in fairly large type, and saw a full column given to the matter. He spread the paper out on the marble table he was sitting at and commenced to read it.

CHAPTER XXII

The Fourth Day. And a Reprint from *The Evening Flash*.

THE PIMLICO ABDUCTION CASE

(Reprinted by Permission from last night's London
Evening Flash)

SURPRISING DEVELOPMENT

WE are able (says last night's *Evening Flash*) to report a surprising development in the strange Pimlico Abduction Case. Acting upon certain information which had reached his ears, a *Flash* man has journeyed to-day into the wilds of Hertfordshire, and the case not being *sub-judice*, we offer to our readers the startling results of his investigations. The gist of the information upon which he acted was that the missing girl, Iris Lees, had been discovered this morning by private detectives, that the place of discovery was a lonely cottage on the edge of a Hertfordshire heath, and that the cottage was in the occupancy of the young man Robert William Gilmour (who was arrested and discharged in connection with the case yesterday morning), and was rented by him in the name of "Jones." It was further stated that Iris Lees and "Mr. Jones" were discovered together in the cottage, and had promptly fled upon the arrival of the amateur police force, coolly commandeering the amateur police

force's own motor car for the purpose, the car afterwards being found abandoned by the roadside. Other information included the further statement that the amateur police then broke into and searched Mr. Jones's, or Mr. Gilmour's, house, and that the search party included the young gentleman of title whose name was peculiarly connected with the case. The *Flash* man has not yet reappeared at the office, and further developments may be expected.

(Special from *The Evening Flash's* own Correspondent)

3.30. We are going about innumerable by-lanes in a part of Hertfordshire more wild than Dartmoor itself, in search of "Heath Cottage" and "Mr. Jones." The natives do not appear to have ever seen a motor car before, for they all appear to be in hiding. Heath Cottage is unknown apparently in any town or village, and not a soul is to be discovered.

3.40. Have just met a postman who has directed us to Heath Cottage. He has never seen "Mr. Jones," but noticed a grey motor car outside the house as he crossed the heath just now. Had never known "Mr. Jones" to receive a letter at Heath Cottage.

4.50. The *Flash* man has escaped into a local post-office to make these his depositions. Left the motor car discreetly behind a thicket on the heathside and made my way on foot to Heath Cottage. Found the grey motor waiting outside, and noted the gold and red crest on the door panels (a wild cat's head, erect, argent). From inside the cottage arose voices, and the *Flash* man approached firmly, leaving the camera man busy outside.

With the first rap on the door the voices ceased, and then followed a loud, though whispered, conversation.

"Somebody must go!"

"Who?"

"It depends who it is that's there!"

"It's nobody's business."

"Certainly not!"

"Could it be the police?"

"Impossible. How should they know anything?"

"True."

"It may simply be the village baker."

"It may be anybody. It may mean something or nothing."

"That is true, too."

"I think you had better go."

"Me?"

"Yes. You are less known than any of us, if it is anybody."

"Indeed!"

"I mean in connection with the case."

"True. Very well. Whatever they want I shall say that nobody is here. Keep the door closed behind me."

The *Flash* man heard footsteps coming down a passage, a bolt was drawn back, and he found himself in the presence of a noble peer whose countenance was better known to the *Flash* man than *vice versa*; the recognition was the *Flash* man's reward for many weary hours spent in marvelling upon Upper House oratory. "Cast thy bread," etc.

"Excuse me, Lord Inkerman—" began the *Flash* man.

For answer there was a deadly silence. Then a door down the passage-way was thrown open and there poured out four other individuals. The *Flash* man found himself seized by the coat-sleeve and hurried

into a back parlour, and heard the outer and inner door closing upon him. It seemed quite a friendly seize, and as two exceedingly charming young ladies were connected with it, your representative thought it his duty to submit discreetly. The room was a picturesque one, full of old-world furniture, and pleasant sunlight filtering in through chintz curtains at the window. A leathern flying-cap was on the table and a large road-map.

"This is very charming of you indeed," said the *Flash* man, looking round at the five faces of his hosts and hostesses, and wondering who else he could recognise. All but one were familiar, in a business sort of way. There was Lord Inkerman, the Honourable Francis Bridges, his son and heir, Mr. Lees, the missing girl's father, and last but not least, the amateur police force as represented by Miss Irene Goldstone, the American lady Sherlock Holmes, whose face is familiar to all devotees of the divorce court. The *Flash* man concluded that the unaccounted-for countenance belonged to one of Miss Goldstone's lieutenants.

"What do you want here? What have you come for?" asked Miss Goldstone, as soon as the *Flash* man had recovered his breath, and whisking away the leathern flying-cap as she spoke.

"Do you want any bread?" asked the *Flash* man softly.

All five stared at one another.

"But you knew my name!" exclaimed his lordship. The theory implied was that a baker may not know a man's name, and it was obviously debatable, but the *Flash* man abandoned further prevarication.

"In the interests of public curiosity," he commenced

"I want to know where Miss Lees has got to, and if Robert Gilmour is Mr. Jones, and if you've got 'em?"

The *Flash* man was interrupted by the staggered expression of the whole five faces. One face cannot ordinarily act as a check to speech, but when five physiognomic phenomena occur simultaneously a sense of responsibility steps in and checks further utterance. The *Flash* man paused abruptly, and awaited developments.

After a pause of almost a full minute all five people began to speak at once, and then Miss Goldstone clapped her hands together, with the result that the voices died discordantly away.

"Young man," said the lady Sherlock Holmes, "before any question that you may care to ask can be answered, it is important that we should know just exactly, right here, who we are speaking to. Are you a policeman or a press man?"

"He said he was a baker," interrupted the noble lord.

Miss Goldstone looked at him and clapped her hands again, full in his face, and the peer relapsed into silence. It occurred to the *Flash* man that here was a new and undeveloped way of checking undesirable noble debate.

"Who are you?" she asked squarely, and in a "right here" tone, destructive of subterfuge.

The *Flash* man yielded up his full name, age and private address, adding one or two references.

"Young man," said the amazonian representative of amateur peace-keeping, "I don't want any sauce. What's your business?"

The *Flash* man was clinched, and he produced his card-case.

The "strip of pasteboard" was handed round in silence, and then Miss Goldstone went to the door and held it open.

"Leave this house," she said incisively.

"Whose house?" asked the *Flash* man.

There was another defunct silence.

"It seems to me," went on the *Flash* man, "that this is anybody's house; a new kind of hostelry, thrown open on the roadside for any wayfarer to enter and take possession of. Tell me it is your house and I will go. Confirm me in my suspicion that it is anybody's house, and I may prefer to stop."

Then rose up the Honourable Francis.

"I may remind you," he said courtly, "that we are five to one."

"Three to one, excuse me," interrupted Miss Goldstone. "In matters of fisticuffs women, at least American women, do not count. But three to one should be good enough."

The *Flash* man folded his arms.

"I consider myself to be Mr. Jones's guest," he said politely.

There was another silence. Then Miss Goldstone pinned on a hat that was resting on the mantelpiece.

"Come," she said. And at this word of command all five "came," or rather went, for they trooped out into the roadway and entered the grey car. The *Flash* man followed them to the door, and waved them a friendly good-bye from the porch, left in full possession of somebody else's house. The next minute, as soon as they got well under way, he modestly quitted Mr. Jones's hospitable roof, secured his own car from behind the brambles, and rolled peacefully away.

It was a chat with somebody else that the *Flash* man wanted now, and presently he came across another cottage on another heath.

Who was Mr. Jones's landlord, and what did the landlord know about him? That was the question, and as luck would have it, it was the landlord's own house that had been struck, and the landlord himself who opened the door. And here is the next item of information. Mr. Jones is a young man who tallies exactly with the description of Mr. Robert William Gilmour. He took the house a year ago, and his landlord observed him this very morning returning from a field where an aeroplane had just descended. "An aeroplane?" echoed the *Flash* man, and remembering the flying-cap, pulled out his one-o'clock *Flash*.

"Mr. Edgar Curtis," he read, "made a fine flight from Hendon to Stevenage and back this morning with a new type of engine that has not hitherto been used for flying purposes. Mr. Curtis carried a passenger for the first part of the journey, and the flight of fully sixty-five miles was executed, with one descent, in the remarkable time of 59 min. 3 sec. The flight was unofficial."

The *Flash* man made his way to the nearest post office and despatched the following wire:—

"CURTIS. Aerodrome. Hendon. Did Gilmour alight safely? Anxious."

In forty minutes the answer came back:

"Yes. Ask him to return cap.—CURTIS."

This is all the information to date, but the *Flash* man and the man with the camera will be busy about the cottage for a little while yet.

Then at the bottom of this transparently scandalous narrative was added the following "editorial":—

The Evening Flash holds itself entirely responsible for the information contained in its correspondent's report, the accuracy of which is fully confirmed from other sources. The disappearance of Miss Lees from "Mr. Jones's" cottage occurred at ten o'clock this morning, but from an inquiry at Scotland Yard at five P.M. this evening it appears that the police have not been communicated with, except by "Mr. Jones's" landlord, who has reported to the local constabulary that his tenant's house has been broken into. It appears to us that either Miss Lees is being persecuted, or a miscarriage of justice is being, for some reason best known to those implicated, connived at. The question now appears to be: *What is Scotland Yard going to do about it?* We don't like the look of the noble lord's position at all. *Who was Francis?*

CHAPTER XXIII

The Fourth Day. Gilmour finds himself on Loch Lomond—
An impatient Traveller—Inversnaid and a profoundly
moving Discovery.

GILMOUR folded the paper, found exactly the same report in the others, and finished his tea.

It was difficult to suggest how this surprising piece of gamboge journalism had ever come to be written. Who was the informant? It was difficult to associate Filmer with so rash a step, but that seemed the only explanation. However, it was useless to concern himself with the origin of the report. The only question now was its significance. What would the police do? Would it lead to Iris's discovery? The one thing that he could be at all sure of was that developments were inevitable, and that it was more necessary than ever that he should possess himself of this trump card of which he was in search. And it was almost equally necessary that he should not be long about it.

He looked up the Balloch trains and found that there was one leaving at nine o'clock with a steam-boat connection for the loch.

It proved a queer train when he took his seat in it, the coaches resonant with a party of American tourists who all wore buttons announcing that they came from Michigan, and whose voices reminded him too much of Irene Goldstone to be agreeable.

The sun was beginning to blaze scorchingly down from a burning sky when at last he stepped aboard *The Lady of the Lake* and caught his first glimpse of the waters of Loch Lomond stretching before him, with their green banks, shallow bays and distant prospect of ultra-picturesque mountains.

A flock of gulls wheeled anxiously above the vessel, and when presently a bell sounded and the cables were slipped, these birds followed closely upon them.

He felt a strange mixture of sensations as the boat paddled its way up the loch, with its chattering crew of almost exclusively Michigan tourists, its absurd feathered followers, and the strong, pungent odour of ham and chicken stealing up from the saloon. He found a rail well to the front, and, leaning over it, watched and waited there impatiently for Inversnaid.

Slowly indeed the little steamer laboured on through the still waters. Far ahead loomed the blue outlines of the tortuous way that had yet to be traversed before Inversnaid would be sighted, and Gilmour sometimes sat and sometimes paced the deck restlessly, struggling to find some pleasure in the scenery, some interest in his fellow passengers. As to the latter, they did nothing to arouse him. The Michigan group stood solemnly by the rails, and listened to a young man who read aloud to them the history of the loch. The gulls still assiduously followed in the ship's wake, and taught a number of the passengers to expend pennies in the saloon, and put them through their tricks of catching scraps of food in mid-air. And all the time there was the exquisite scenery in full view, yet seeming, somehow, to owe its existence to *The Lady of the Lake* and her passengers, and to prostrate its green banks with a sycophantic humility before them. Loch Lomond

looked less real to Gilmour than the cheapest daub in a Strand cheap-jack's auction-room.

He wandered into the saloon, but the food was too alluring, and he marched the deck again, in spite of the repeated ringing of the dining-bell, and at last found refuge in keeping near the ship's one genuine-seeming spot, the forecastle hatchway, from which arose a pleasant odour of tar and tarpaulin. A glimpse was to be caught, too, of grimy-faced sailors eating normal food out of honest tin cans.

Hours seemed to pass in this way, but presently he found that Inversnaid's landing-stage was actually in sight, and at last the steamer reached it, and he stepped off into what was certainly a most enchanting little bay.

Half Michigan stepped off also, and they trooped up the sandy little road to the most visible edifice in the bay, the inn, beside "the lake, the waterfall" which Wordsworth had written of.

It seemed the only likely place in view, and as he had to make inquiries somewhere he followed Michigan into the inn parlour.

To ask any serious question about people actually living in the vicinity of Inversnaid seemed an impossibility. Excited waiters were racing about with luncheon dishes, and he walked out into the air again.

He found the waterfall at the back and gazed at it with a conscientious attempt at interest, but he found it difficult to believe that it was in any wise genuine, for such is the reaction of sight-seeing; the incapacity that follows hard upon it to realise that one is ever looking at a real thing. It seemed much easier to imagine that the water was pumped up before ever it came down, and that the stones were lath and plaster. To accept the theory that at one time here was a piece

of native nature demanded a boldness of imagination that was not his.

Presently he turned away from the waterfall and wandered back to the precincts of the inn, and seeing an old man in the yard, who from his dress was apparently a real lochside peasant, he opened a conversation :

"Where do the other people at Inversnaid live?" he asked.

"There isn't exactly any other people," the old man told him. "Not what you might call people."

"No boatmen?" asked Gilmour.

"There is a boatman's cottage, yes," answered the old man. "When I come to think of it, there is, but it is let to a fishing party fra' Glasgow. The boatman is dead."

The possibility of finding Iris's father and finding him dead was one that Gilmour had not allowed himself to dwell upon; and he pursued his inquiries with trepidation. "Who was the dead boatman?"

"A young man by the name of Garvey. H' cam' fra' Edinburgh, a year since, in consumption, and he died."

Gilmour was very greatly relieved. "Were there any other boatmen?"

The old man shook his head. "Not for some years there haven't been any," he answered. "Not what ye could call boatmen."

"Who was the last?"

"There were a mon here once by the name of Martin," answered the old fellow, "but he's no here now, for he left three years since or more; and he was no of the lochside, but fra' the south somewhere."

Gilmour asked himself where on earth he had heard

the name of Martin lately, but he could not for the life of him remember.

"Is Martin dead too?" he asked.

"Dead? No," answered the other. "Doing well, I should be reckoning. He's in London the noo, and in fine trim."

"In London?" asked Gilmour.

"He't a lad," answered the other, "muckle sharp in his line of business. Drew houses and that, and then built 'um. He was pupil at the Art School at Glasgow, and he fair laced the masters there, he was so plisky at the work. Some of the Glasgow Council Buildings are fra' the lad's own scribble, and he got on so that he came and fetched his old father fra' here, and I take it he's in London the noo, and a rich mon."

Gilmour stared at his informer.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed.

"It's all true enough," said the man.

"When does a boat go back to Balloch?" Gilmour almost shouted at him.

There were four hours to wait, and Gilmour felt less able to tolerate them than he had the early part of his train journey on the previous evening. To relieve himself he seized upon the old man and carried him back into the inn, where he much amazed him by the liberality of his treating.

"Who were these Martins?" he asked. "How many of them were there?"

He learnt the whole family history. The old man well remembered how some twenty years before Martin had come to the Loch, and how some six years later his boat had been run down by this very *Lady of the Lake*, and Martin half drowned and his leg entirely

broken. There had been several children besides the one who drew houses. There was a little girl whom a lady and gentleman off this same *Lady of the Lake* took away with them; there was a boy who had since died, another who had gone to Canada; another girl who had married the captain of one of the steamers, and still another was at the Art School "the noo."

With astounding facility the whole story thus came to his astonished ears.

Gilmour was amazed beyond not only words, but even ideas. He could not sit still, and so he quitted his companion, wandering out to the waterfall and throwing stones at it for a full hour. He spent another hour leaping from rock to rock up the tumbling stream as it came down from the hills. He made excursions up precipitous, heather-covered promontories and climbed mountain-ash trees. In fact, he did everything he could think of to while away the time while he waited for the *Lady of the Lake* to carry him back to Balloch and to Iris. And he had journeyed the first half of close on a thousand miles to find the man who had walked to Letchworth station with him to see him off!

CHAPTER XXIV

The Fourth Day. Involving a Retrospect of the Third—
Lord Inkerman and an Interview with Irene—A Re-
arrangement of Forces.

WHATEVER was Gilmour's state of mind when he caught his enraging glimpse of the placard on Euston Station, it was as nothing to what others concerned in the same case had endured.

After the surprising visit of the reporter to the cottage, and the precipitous flight of Inkerman and his party, an absolute agony of suspense had followed. The car had headed straight back to London like a fox to its burrow, for whatever was to be done could be best done there. It was half-past five when they drew up outside the offices at Chancery Lane to gain the privacy of the attic room with its series of silence-doors.

It was as the car drew up outside the offices that a young man with an engaging smile stepped up to Irene and lifted his hat.

"Miss Goldstone?"

"Yes?"

"I represent the *Flash*. I wondered if there were any fresh—"

Inkerman, Lees, Bridges, and Miss Silby, who had all stopped to listen, bolted, together with Irene, for the doorway. The next instant and the party had disappeared into the building.

The young man went out into the road and carefully photographed the waiting grey car, while a crowd began rapidly to collect about the premises.

"What's the matter?" they asked the young man. But he gave them no information and hurried off to his official dark room.

The crowd continued to wait, and when Bridges heavily goggled, came out and leapt into his seat at the steering wheel there was much unsatisfied curiosity. He sent the car off at a reckless speed and took it round to its maker in Long Acre, where he asked to leave it for an hour. Then he made his way back to the Chancery Lane office.

During the drive up from Hertfordshire very little had been said, but once in the attic consulting-room the conversation had been animated enough.

Obviously this was the work of Filmer, and one of the first steps taken was to send a message round to Lees' bank with instructions to stop the cheque, if it had not already been cashed. By this time Bridges rejoined them, and they settled down to talk in earnest.

What would be the result of this journalistic discovery? What use would *The Evening Flash* make of its news?

Irene stuck to the hope that it would be made to read only like a sensational story of the steps Lees was taking to find his daughter, but she feared the worst. She had left instructions for a clerk to be on the lookout for the *Flash*, and at six o'clock—precisely the moment when Gilmour was reading the placard from the train window—the newspaper was brought in to them.

"'Pimlico Outrage. Startling Development,' that's what's on the placard," the clerk reported.

Irene waited until they were alone again before she opened the pink sheets. Then she stood at the window and read aloud the whole report.

Inkerman, Bridges and Lees heard it like caged wild things. They walked the room, crossing and recrossing one another, and occasionally uttering exclamatory monosyllables of disgust and vituperation. The reading ended with one explosive curse from Lord Inkerman.

"The petrol," said Irene, "is on the fire," and she sat down at her desk, pursing her lips and looking preternaturally quiet, almost like one asleep.

She knew that for five minutes at least nothing at all to the point would or could be said by the others. Filmer was cursed in every aspect of him, the reporter was blasted in total, and there was a chaotic babel of recrimination. But presently this energy outspent itself, and at the first honest lull Irene spoke.

"It is only for the moment, Lord Inkerman," she said, her own feelings so suppressed that her American drawl had disappeared, "that this rag of humanly degraded paper can do you harm. Your triumph over it is absolutely assured. There's the law of libel, there's the law of slander. That rag is a promissory note for thousands of pounds damages. It is an inverted apology. It is the forerunner of humiliation and surrender. In short, you've got them, Lord Inkerman, and you've no reason for any other emotion than that of self-congratulation, a rubbing of your hands and a whetting of your knife. By Lincoln!" and Irene got up and commenced to pace the room herself, "if that isn't journalism all over. Sell your papers to-day and pay your damages

to-morrow. The bigger the lie the bigger the circulation. It'll be bigger damages, but it'll square out right in the end. It's a cash trade. They get the use of the damages before they pay them over. After all, it's a stimulation of business. That article's a creation of capital. They write the libel, and sell it for a halfpenny a look. The great B.P. pays for the libel in the end, as it pays for everything, but it's business—good solid business! We ought to be shaking hands all round, Lord Inkerman, and not grumbling at a slice of Kismet like this!"

Inkerman and Lees were staring at one another, for Irene's faith in them was not now a particularly welcome element in the situation.

"Mud sticks," said Lord Inkerman.

"Yes, and whitewashing's obvious," agreed Irene, "but this isn't mud. These are solid stones, and stones don't stick. Don't you lose heart. It's only put new fire into me. We want the girl now worse than ever we wanted her. We want that marriage with her poor chauffeur lover, and we're going to have it."

"Look here," said Lees suddenly, "would you mind leaving us three to talk privately, just for a few minutes. His lordship feels this outrageous attack upon himself, and I think——"

"Certainly," said Irene. "I quite appreciate it. I hate to see a man grieved, and I guess I've a little stack of letters waiting for me to sit an inquest on them downstairs. You've a bell there when you've finished. Just push it."

She went off downstairs and left them.

"I'm charged right up now," she muttered, as she descended the steps. "An old name's pretty sacred

still in this country, and I'm doing moral work when I help to keep it so."

"Look here," Lees was declaring, "we'd better tell this young woman everything. She's a sensible sort, and she'd understand."

Inkerman had gone to the window, and now he turned back.

"On the contrary," he declared, "it can go no farther. There's only one thing to do here, and it's got to be done."

"What's that?" growled Bridges.

"You must marry the girl."

"Marry——" stammered his son. "I don't understand, sir."

Lees had brought his hands, coat and all, up to his armpits in a movement of amazement. He let them down again and stood limp and desperately expressionless, for fear of betraying his excitement.

"There's only the one thing," went on his lordship. "And it's a fitting punishment for your folly. You must find the girl, you must marry her, and you must make a pretty romance of it. As your intended wife she'll stand by the chauffeur story, then, and we will have a nice, sentimental little tale, in the place of this blackguard one. We will explain that your interest in the case was the result purely of a secret liking for the girl. Satisfied that she had run away from Pimlico because she realised that she didn't really want the chauffeur, you joined the search-party determined to conceal the state of your feelings no longer. You find her—which of course has yet to be done—and you marry with the photographers in attendance."

"Are you speaking seriously?" Bridges asked.

"It's your punishment."

"I'm awfully grateful, sir," murmured Bridges sheepishly.

"Don't talk like a fool," said his father. "You've brought it on yourself, and you must make the best of it. Lees, ring that bell."

"But, your lordship," exclaimed Lees, "do we tell all this to Miss Goldstone too? I mean the same story that you'll tell the press."

"Word for word. No confidences between ourselves and that woman."

"She might think it thin, my lord."

"Well, don't touch that bell, then," said Inkerman, and went to the window again.

"Look here," he said, turning back, "we tell her that I desire this marriage because I recognise that it will stop the scandal. It is a sacrifice to the family name—a dreadful sacrifice! Ring the bell now."

Lees rang it and the three men waited. In a few minutes Irene re-entered the room.

"Miss Goldstone," began Lord Inkermam, "my decision may surprise you, but I have commanded my son here, in view of this infamous connection of our name with this case, to find and to marry Iris Lees."

Irene stood staring at him.

"The family name demands it," went on his lordship. "My interest and my son's interest in this case has been absolutely disinterested, as you know, but in view of this scandalous misinterpretation of my generous feelings towards an old servant, I bow to the halfpenny papers. My son Francis will declare to the world that he has always had a secret affection for this girl. Her present trouble has

stirred him to avow it. He finds her, he proposes, she accepts, and I reluctantly consent. We will make a pretty idyll of it now. The name of Inkerman demands it."

"Oh!" said Irene.

"I'm going to write you out a cheque now for whatever sum you need," went on Inkerman, moving to the desk and producing his cheque-book. "You must move heaven and earth—if it takes an army of people—to get in touch with that girl before to-morrow morning."

"Hold on, though, just half-a-minute," said Irene. "I want to ask you what you take me for. What stuff do you think I'm made of?"

"My good soul!" exclaimed Lord Inkerman, rising.

"Mine, if you please," said Irene. "Your good soul! That's just about what you seem to think I am. I want to know if you've been using me to cover up your pup's tracks, because, if you have, I've two minds to put my sleeves right up and throw the three of you down the stairs."

"You're mad," said Inkerman.

"I am—very," agreed Irene. "I'm just mad, but I'm sane-mad, if you know what that means. Robert Gilmour told me in this very room, and it was only yesterday, that it was this splendid son of yours that the girl was dodging from. He told me then that I'd be sick when I learnt the truth. If you'd told me from the first that it was a scandal you were trying to patch up, I might have gone some ways with you—far enough to find the girl and see if she wanted your boy, or not, if there was a square marriage like you're proposing now, but you didn't tell me, and you've never meant to act square till everybody but me has found you out. Now you talk of a flesh-and-blood girl who's done her

best to protect her own honour as a family sacrifice. Whose is the sacrifice ? ”

“ I told you I was prepared to sacrifice my son,” said Inkerman lamely.

“ Sacrifice him ! Look here, write that cheque out. I’ve had enough of you. Write it out for what you like, for it’s going right out of that window in a hundred pieces.”

“ But look here,” exclaimed Lees, “ you’re simply standing in the girl’s light.”

“ I’m going to,” said Irene, “ and before she’s many hours older.”

“ Miss Goldstone,” said Lord Inkerman, getting up from the desk, “ here is a cheque for five hundred pounds. Surely——”

“ Thanks,” said Irene, and tore it slowly and very carefully into pieces. “ There is the door, gentlemen.”

“ Am I to take it that you’re against us now, then ? ” asked Lord Inkerman ; “ that you propose using this imaginary knowledge, that you have come by, or think you have, in the course of absolutely confidential business, to damage me and my name—that——”

“ You’re to take it,” said Irene, “ that I’m simply well rid of you, and that whatever steps I may take to assist this young woman, our business is, has been, and ever will be, confidential.”

“ Well, thanks for that anyhow,” gasped Bridges, lifting his hat at the door.

“ Good-afternoon,” said Irene.

CHAPTER XXV

The Fourth Day. Gilmour receives a Telegram and commences the return Journey—Mrs. Filmer also receives a Telegram and Filmer sees a Copy of it—An Interview with Lord Inkerman and the Slip of a Cup.

WHEN Gilmour had succeeded in wantonly destroying two hours of time, by methods already enumerated, he made his way back to the inn at Inversnaid, and discovered a telegraph-boy waiting in the yard.

In moments of anxiety the sight of a telegram is often alarming to the most hardened, but it did not occur to Gilmour that he could possibly be concerned with the duties of this youth, until the landlord standing at the inn door inquired if his name happened to be Gilmour.

He said it was, and the boy came up, unfastening his pouch.

"I've a telegram for Gilmour, Inversnaid," he said. "I've cycled over with it fra' the office. I wasn't in any hurry or I might have taken it back before this."

Gilmour took the envelope and tore it open. He did not betray any particular emotion, but his face paled a little. What he read was :

"In consequence newspaper reports Mr. Martin has suspected identity and turned me out. Whatever the consequences have determined to return at once to school at Eastbourne.—IRIS."

Gilmour read it through twice. Then he looked to see when and where it had been handed in. He found that the place was Letchworth and the hour ten A.M. that morning. And the time was then just on two o'clock.

"Any answer, sir?" asked the boy.

"Half-a-minute," said Gilmour, and turned away, to try and understand this new situation. Heaven knew he would have time enough to think about it through all the long hours that must pass before he could reach England and the south, but something had to be done now and at the moment.

"The school at Eastbourne." He realised that he had not the faintest idea what school. And Eastbourne was full of young ladies' schools. Iris herself could not be communicated with. He thought of Martin, and all that he had learnt about him, and turning back he asked the boy for a form. It was forthcoming and he sat on a seat in the yard and wrote out a message that occurred to him only on the spur of the moment.

"MARTIN. Garden City. Letchworth.—Fanny Smith otherwise Iris Lees is your daughter. Go at once to Henry Lees care of Lord Inkerman, Brentford Grange, Brentford, London, and demand her restitution if you would save her from infamous plot. You will find Iris at some ladies' school Eastbourne. Consult police if necessary. I am reaching Euston by first possible train.—GREEN."

He handed this message to the boy, and bade him race for the telegraph office, giving him half-a-sovereign and telling him to keep the change.

"The boat's just coming in, if you're going to go by it," said the innkeeper.

Out on the loch the *Lady of the Lake* was slowly labouring to the pier, all the passengers who had alighted at Inversnaid appeared mysteriously about the premises and commenced to walk down to the landing-stage.

"Heavens," groaned Gilmour, as he stepped aboard, "to be this ghastly distance from her!" At the best he could not possibly reach London until the early hours of the following morning, or Eastbourne until well into the day. He felt a savage fury at the leisurely manner in which matters were going forward on the boat. No one but himself was in the smallest hurry. The absurd birds had apparently followed the steamer all the way and turned back with it, and now they perched on the vessel itself, as if a long wait at Inversnaid was to be expected.

But presently the paddles were revolving and the ropes thrown off and they were moving slowly down the loch.

No sensation in all his varied ones since that fateful morning only three days before, when he had had this strange business thrust upon him, in any way equalled what he now endured on the journey to Balloch. The decks were crowded with laughing, happy people, the sun shone on the wonderful scenery, and the saloon bell rang continuously. Gilmour felt like some lost and abandoned soul. A passenger who essayed to converse with him was walked abruptly away from, and a gull that perched on his coat sleeve was subjected to the novel experience of being knocked off. The whole thing was like

a nightmare, but even as nightmares pass, so this terrible journey at last ended, and something before four o'clock Balloch was reached and a train for Glasgow boarded.

There was some movement, some activity, now, and throwing himself into a window-seat he shut his eyes and looked into the situation.

One thing was quite clear, he realised. Iris's return to the school would be at once reported to Lees, and long before he, Gilmour, could possibly hope to reach the scene a crisis would have been reached. What could he do to stop it?

There were always the police, he reflected, but just as he had stated to the magistrate that "delays were dangerous," so he argued now. And then it occurred to him that he would write to Irene Goldstone. She was no friend, in fact he could regard her only in the light of his worst earthly enemy—but she was a sane person to whom a sane statement could be made, and arriving at Glasgow he made a dash for the station and inquired for the first London train.

Luck had not entirely deserted him. At five-fifty-five an express would start for Euston, and it was then half-past five exactly. He walked to the telegraph office and despatched this message:

"IRENE GOLDSTONE 144B Chancery Lane London.
—I warn you that if Iris Lees is removed from Eastbourne I go to the police and court full inquiry.—
ROBERT GILMOUR."

This step gave him some satisfaction, and by the time the train had started he had considerably calmed down. He took dinner, found a sleeping-compartment

and made another of his supreme efforts to master the agonies of impatience and incurable suspense. At three-fifty they were due to reach London. There would be an early train for Eastbourne, and he could hope to reach there at least by eight o'clock.

But long before this, other and not less potent happenings were taking place in the neighbourhood of London, and not the least was a visit which Mrs. Filmer paid to the Hazelmere post office a little before eleven o'clock that morning.

On the previous afternoon she had led her husband home, humbled enough, and had been a generous victor. They had played two-handed bridge—a game he detested—the whole of the afternoon and evening as a token of reconciliation, and then in the early morning Filmer had gone off in gaiters and a cap, leaving a message on the breakfast-table that he was going to take a long country walk.

He was not in the habit of leaving notes on the breakfast-table, and Mrs. Filmer, waking to find that she was alone, had very shortly become suspicious and begun to investigate matters.

She found, for instance, that her husband had taken his season ticket from the waistcoat pocket where she knew he had placed it on the previous day, and after waiting until nearly eleven o'clock she prepared to go to town. But for the morning papers she would have started earlier, but the accounts of the Pimlico development detained her.

She stopped at the post office for a characteristic reason. There was a handsome young woman employed there, and in the absence of her husband she seldom failed to call and purchase stamps at the place because she had once found him talking to

the girl in question. And now she made her usual purchase.

"There's a telegram just come in, madam," said the postmaster, "for Filmer, Hazelmere Post Office. We wouldn't be supposed to send it to the house, as it's addressed like that, but since you've called——" And he handed it across the counter.

Mrs. Filmer opened and read the message.

It was a brief one, and it ran :

"Returning to Eastbourne. Shall hold your honour hostage for mine. After what happened yesterday I advise you to make my interests yours.—IRIS LEES."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Filmer. "It's quite all right."

She smiled painfully, and almost groped her way out of the sunlit building. There was an ancient hansom cab outside, and although the station was not many yards distant she climbed into it, and told the man to hurry.

It was as well she did, because she just caught a train for Waterloo, and at a few minutes after one o'clock she drew up outside Irene Goldstone's offices in the taxi-cab which she had literally run to from the train.

"Miss Goldstone is not in," a clerk informed her.

"Not in?" The intense expostulation of her tone suggested that Irene was forgetting an important appointment, and Mrs. Filmer was shown apologetically into the consulting-room, where in a few moments Miss Silby joined her.

No, Miss Goldstone had left the office on the previous evening and had not returned. She had telephoned from Kimpton, however, at ten that morning, and stated that unless they heard further she would return by one.

They had not heard further and it was a quarter past one. No doubt——”

Simultaneously Irene herself came into the room.

“Mrs. Filmer?” she cried. “Well, I’m not sure that I want to see you. Your precious husband—so I take it—has led me into a situation that’s not particularly enviable. For the last eighteen hours I’ve been not only on the go, but I’ve been realizing something of the sensations of failure. I’m sick and I’m tired and I’ve no energy left to talk to you with, unless it’s on one subject and one only—the address at this moment of Iris Lees.”

“And I want the address of my husband,” said Mrs. Filmer grimly.

“I can’t give it you,” Irene retorted, dropping into a seat at her desk, and pushing back her hat so that her head might lean on her hand. “But I can tell you where it should be—or one of several places—Wormwood Scrubbs is one, Purgatory’s another——”

“Look here,” said Mrs. Filmer, and thrust the telegram on to the desk in front of the little detective.

“Eastbourne!” exclaimed Irene, and her tired body seemed to visibly replenish its energies. “Eastbourne!”

“And my husband would be there too?”

“We’ll see,” cried Irene. “One moment,” and she held her hand aloft and spoke rapidly into the telephone.

“Say, down there. You’ll send up here an ABC, and when that’s done send out at once for three ham sandwiches and a milk and soda and a macaroon.”

She hung up the receiver again.

“What are you going to do?”

“I’m going to Eastbourne,” said Irene.

“We’ll both go,” said Mrs. Filmer.

And almost at the same hour that this was happening,

Gilmour was receiving his message on the banks of the Scottish lake.

Filmer meanwhile was not having a more cheerful morning than his wife. He had left for London with the intention of cashing Lees' cheque and learning the fate of Gilmour's. He wore his tweed suit and cap and hoped that by reaching London at ten he would have time to return to Hazelmere by twelve and with something of the appearance of one who has endured a fatiguing walk. It was a matter of rush. He cabbed it from Waterloo to Lees' bank and received his first blow. He was asked to kindly refer to the drawer. He went on to his own bank, and inquired what amount stood to his credit there. He was told fifteen pounds. A cheque for two hundred and fifty—what about that? The cheque for two hundred and fifty had been returned refer to drawer.

He went back to Waterloo and just caught a train returning to his home; alone in a carriage he gave tongue to his feelings.

Yet there was nothing that he could do. As for the threatened divorce suit, he felt desperate enough to let that matter go hang. He had somehow gone through so much during the last few days that he knew that if he had received that money he would have buried it in the back garden before he would have handed it over to any third person. He had been poor enough before this business had started, and for three days he had thrown his scanty capital recklessly away. All he cared for now was to make good. There was a holocaust of trouble in front of him with Mrs. Filmer, but he regarded it rather with torpor. He had been too sensitive. What did it matter?

This torpor obliged him when he passed the post

office to go in and see the pretty girl there. It was the only sort of thing that seemed worth doing.

"That telegram, I suppose you've seen it," said the young lady.

Filmer was anxious at the sound of the word, and more anxious when he heard that a message presumably for himself had fallen into the hands of his wife. He asked to see a copy, and it was shown him. The young lady was a little astonished when he handed it back to her, looked up at the clock, and precipitously left the building.

Filmer knew that there was a train back to town again which he might just catch, and he went at a double to the station, throwing himself into the guard's van as the last of the carriages steamed out.

At first he had no objective more definite than to fly Hazelmere, but in the train a reckless desire to make use of his information—if only as an antidote to his personal, marital, alarm—overcame him. This was at half-past twelve; at half-past two he had reached London, and at half-past three he arrived at Inkerman Grange.

The mixture of numbness and reckless indifference to further consequences, coupled with a kind of dazed pleasure in excitement at any price remained. It was what had decided him to go again to Lees, and offer once more to disclose the secret of Iris's whereabouts; he approached this new adventure boldly.

The worst they could do would be to personally assault him, and if they did, then he would certainly have much fun for his money—or rather his lost money. He had done nothing to get himself into any real trouble, and, judging from the *Flash's* report,

Inkerman would not ask for much more publicity. It seemed a particularly agreeable notion to make him and Lees eat those instructions to the bank, and there was a chance that it could be done.

The servant at the Grange met him with the assurance that Mr. Lees was out. She had no idea when he might return. In fact, he was away, motoring with his lordship, and had been since the last day.

Filmer was inside the lodge gates and had seen the magnificent Inkerman House standing farther back in the grounds. He made his way thither and rang the chain of a great bell at the portals.

His lordship was out, he was informed. His lordship was out motoring and had been since the previous day. There was no manner of telling when his lordship might return.

But even as the man spoke, the grey car, its colour, indistinguishable now under a coat of dust, swung round the drive and came to a standstill at the gates.

Filmer stepped forward and beheld Inkerman, Lees, and the Honourable Francis.

The servant, accompanied now by a second footman had come out on to the steps, and the path was smoothed for Filmer.

"Ask that gentleman into the smoking-room," growled out Lord Inkerman, and one of the men conducted him into the house.

Filmer stood waiting for his host, half with satisfaction and half with uneasiness. It was a long wait, a wait of almost half-an-hour, before Inkerman, Bridges and Lees came like a procession into the room. The Scotchman was brushing the crumbs of biscuits from his clothes.

"Now, what is it that you want?" asked Inkerman, advancing upon Filmer, not altogether hospitably.

"Would you like to know once again where Iris Lees has got to?" Filmer asked, grinning with a painful effort at an easy self-possession.

There was a pause, during which the three men looked at one another. When Lord Inkerman spoke it was very civilly.

"Yes," he said. "I am prepared to overlook yesterday, if you can give me that information."

"Ah," said Filmer, with his grin becoming less painful, "the question is whether I am prepared to overlook it. I believe Mr. Lees here gave me a cheque yesterday and afterwards gave instructions that it should not be honoured."

"Under certain well-defined circumstances, yes."

"Well," said Filmer, "I will waive that cheque and the precedent of price which it suggested. Give me five hundred pounds and I will give you the information which you still seem to want."

"I'll give you in charge first," answered Lord Inkerman.

Filmer took up his hat.

"Good-afternoon, then," he said brightly.

Lord Inkerman stopped him at the door.

"But look here," he exclaimed, "this is sheer impudence. We'll give you a reasonable sum. We'll give you fifty pounds."

"Five hundred," said Filmer doggedly.

"Fifty."

"Five hundred."

"I'll give you one hundred."

"Good-morning again, my lord," said Filmer.

There was another long pause.

"I'll go to one hundred and fifty."

"My price is five hundred."

Lees interrupted.

"Under the circumstances, my lord," he exclaimed, "I'll go another hundred out of my own pocket. Make it two hundred and fifty."

"All right," said Inkerman. "That is absolutely a final offer. Two hundred and fifty pounds."

"My own offer is absolutely final," Filmer declared. "Five hundred pounds or nothing. You're only wasting time, remember. We've been ten minutes already."

"Look here," put in Bridges, "I'll go a hundred myself. The man can't be fool enough to refuse three hundred and fifty."

"I would refuse four hundred and ninety pounds," answered Filmer. "We've been twelve minutes now."

It was at this moment that a servant knocked and entered. He bore a telegram on a salver.

"For Mr. Lees."

The man withdrew and Lees opened the envelope. Then he handed the message to Lord Inkerman.

His lordship looked up from the perusal.

"This little interruption," he said quietly, "has brought me to my senses. I'll not give you twopence for your information—no, sir, not if you'd accept twopence. Kindly leave the house."

Filmer stared about him.

"You offered three fifty," he exclaimed. "I accept it."

"Not three fifty halfpence, nor twopence, as I told you."

Lord Inkerman rang the bell.

"Show this gentleman into the street," he said, when the footman returned.

Filmer might have indulged in a brawl, but after gazing with a return of torpor at the three men and the servant he walked quietly off.

"But, my dear father——" said Bridges, when the door had closed again.

"Listen here," said Inkerman. "This is a wire from the headmistress of the girls' school at Eastbourne :

"Miss Lees returned here at 3 P.M. Kindly remove her immediately."

CHAPTER XXVI

The Night of the Fourth Day and the Dawn of the Fifth. Impossibilities at Eastbourne—Gilmour, Martin and Miss Silby meet at Euston.

IRENE would have dispensed with Mrs. Filmer as a travelling companion very willingly, but that lady was obviously determined to go to Eastbourne, for if this girl, Iris Lees, was seeking communion with her husband, she could not do better than go to the scene of such intended mischief.

There had been no very convenient train. They had just lost one, and it was after three o'clock when they steamed out of Victoria Station, and five o'clock when they reached Eastbourne.

It had been anything but a pleasant journey for Irene. She wanted to think, and Mrs. Filmer wanted not merely to talk, but to talk loudly and shrilly and abusively, in the language of vengeance. Mrs. Filmer was one of those persons who imagine that the most intimate family matters may be discussed in public provided there is a cautious ignoring or substitution of names, and her conversation would have been transparently scandalous if the only other occupant of the carriage had not happened to be an elderly gentleman of Saxon extraction who was wholly irritated by the annoyance of being subjected to any conversation at all, and he left the carriage at the first station.

Irene's chief concern was the obvious difficulty of searching Eastbourne for one particular occupant of a girls' school. "There are few institutions so discreetly guarded as a young ladies' seminary. It is essentially a place which even a detective cannot make pertinent or impertinent inquiries about." So she soliloquised, and not without reason.

"Anyway," said Mrs. Filmer, "I am very sure to be ahead of Lloyd. He could not possibly have caught the train we missed, and I think I shall watch the station, leaving you to make your own inquiries your own way."

This was altogether satisfactory, and so at Eastbourne Irene left her companion.

"I must get somewhere where I can think quietly," Irene told herself, and she turned down a wide street leading to the town.

For half-an-hour she walked very slowly on.

The conclusion that she came to was that to ask questions at all should be her last resource. The police, certainly, would tell her nothing. The best thing she could think of was to walk down towards the sea-front in the hopes that numberless processions of young ladies might pass her, and that from their demeanour it might be just possible to discover even the very establishment which Irene had returned to. It was almost certain that it would be a bombshell to her school, and anything so exciting should easily be apparent to a close observer.

Down on the esplanade she was not disappointed in the matter of meeting the numberless processions. They tramped the pavement in every direction, but not all her close and careful scrutiny could discover in any of the myriad of youthful faces which she saw any

evidence that the cloistered monotony of their lives had been relieved.

And by six o'clock the processions themselves had died away; the last of them that she could find had wound its way between the gates of its gaol and disappeared.

She now conducted a few inquiries. For instance she looked through the files of a local paper in the hopes that some clue might be found there in the recent reports of the case, but they were discreetly silent. So was the sub-editor whom she interviewed on the subject.

Already it was getting late in the day, and a little before eight o'clock she went back into the town in search of the post office, having left instructions with her clerks that messages of importance might be forwarded to her there.

It was in the High Street that she saw signs of commotion and heard a voice which she thought she recognised. A great crowd was coming down the street towards her, and she pushed her way to a point of vantage from which she might see what it was that was happening. She saw policemen's helmets and a woman's hat. Then there went by her Mrs. Filmer in close custody, and in her wake was Lloyd Filmer being marched along by other constables.

"They was fighting up at the railway station," she heard one small boy tell another.

Irene withdrew with promptitude. She was not surprised at this provision of a new experience for either Filmer or his wife, but it did not concern her.

She went on to the post office.

"Are there any telegrams for Goldstone?"

There was a telegram for Goldstone. There was one that had been waiting at the office for some hours. She

received it and read it, and it was Gilmour's message from Scotland sent on to her from her office.

"Gilmour wires from Glasgow Central Station 5.35 P.M. I warn you that if Iris Lees is removed from Eastbourne I go to the police and court full inquiry."

Irene went out into the street again, and reflected upon this message.

Little did Gilmour know that it was as his friend and Iris Lees' friend that she was working now. And yet she could do nothing to help him. Her hands were tied and she could hope only for some piece of sheer luck to help her make good.

She re-read the wire, and soon extracted from it sufficient data upon which to build up a new, if rather a forlorn, hope. It was dispatched from a Glasgow railway station, and nothing was more probable than that Gilmour himself was journeying at all speed for Eastbourne. She made a rough calculation that if this surmise was correct he could not reach Eastbourne until the next morning, but now it interested her to reduce these calculations to a detailed figure. She walked into the town and, fixing upon the Seven Stags Hotel, booked a room for the night and then settled down to study the time-tables.

She wanted to see Gilmour, wanted badly to see him and it was possible, too, that he would know the school. It was a hope that a little cheered her.

She worked out the trains and found that her theory was probably correct. As a matter of fact it was exactly so. Gilmour, she theorised, had caught the five-fifty-five from Glasgow. At three-fifty the next morning he would reach Euston. She looked up the

Eastbourne trains, and found that the first left London Bridge at six-twenty, reaching Eastbourne at eight-seven. All this Gilmour had doubtless also learnt for himself, and there was the position. At eight-seven the next morning, she was as certain as that she sat there, Gilmour, if left to himself, would alight at Eastbourne.

She would not be afraid or ashamed to meet him. She owed him atonement and would give it, and she only considered in what way she could help him. She went through to the telephone box and gave the number of her office. Miss Silby would be there—she had left those instructions—and it occurred to her how she could very slightly forward matters.

Her trunk call did not take many minutes to be answered, and Miss Silby's voice came to her over the wires.

"Yes?"

"Is there anything more for me bearing on this case—I don't want to be worried about anything else."

"Yes. There's another message from Gilmour, from Carlisle. It's exactly the same as the first."

"Good. Now I want you just to be at Euston Station to-morrow morning at three-fifty with a fast car. You're to meet the Scotch express and find Gilmour getting off it. You're to go right up to him, and you're to give him a message. You're to tell him that Miss Goldstone is already sick, as he said she would be, and is at Eastbourne trying to do her best to help Miss Lees. You're to tell him you've got a car there to race him through to Eastbourne at top speed, and that I will meet him on the road outside the town, with or without Miss Lees. Tell him I'm doing my

dead level best to trace her here and that he's got a friend in me. Travel up with him if he don't object. That's all. I'm Eastbourne 237. Good-bye."

She hung up the receiver, and went out into the town again. If she had not stopped for less than half-a-minute to stroke a large cat that was walking across the hall she would have seen the grey car pass by her very hotel door. It was more dust-stained than ever, but she could hardly have failed to recognise it or its occupants.

And Gilmour, meanwhile, was being conveyed at sixty good miles an hour through the wide fields of Westmoreland.

He lay back in his corner seat, looking out into a moonlit night, and as now and again the lights of a farmhouse gleamed for a few moments across the hills it was borne in upon him what a very individual business life was. Out there where the lights—already far behind him—had just shone, was someone's home, someone's life centre. There were people going in and out of rooms, working, talking, anticipating, and away in the distance those people just faintly heard the muffled roar of this flying caravan which was all in all to him.

And on the train in every carriage were other people, men and women, making this journey under the all-impelling will of their own desires and destinies. How infinitely little one man seemed in the scheme of things, and yet how limitlessly all-important was every man to himself.

He was no longer particularly impatient; a sort of rest had come over him, and although for half-a-dozen hours yet they must still swirl on along the magic track of moonlit rails, he was neither uneasy nor

uncomfortable. He made his head very comfortable indeed in the angles of the padded window corner and dozed into oblivion. Sometimes he awoke to drowsily realise that they had stopped somewhere, listening to the monotonous slamming of doors and wheeling of trucks; all hushed with the peculiar quietness of a midnight station. He slept again, and when he awoke it was at the first whisper of dawn and to find the train at a standstill out on the line amidst the fields. It was a dawn that seemed full of hopeful angury. He let down the window quietly and a fragrant odour, that he knew instinctively was the smell of the country towards the south, fanned in upon him. It was still dark, but with a clear, rinsed-looking sky. He heard a conversation far back down the train, between, apparently, a guard and a signalman, and he recognised the Hertfordshire tongue. The signalman was exchanging family news with the guard. He had just been "shifted" to where he was. His missus liked it better because it was nearer for the youngsters to get to school. How was the missus? The missus was pretty well, in fact the missus was going on very nicely.

A signal clanged down the line, the conversation ceased and the wheels of the train began to grind on the track as they moved forward once more into the stillness which this great express from Scotland was to disturb briefly with its wild motion and thunderous noise.

Gilmour dropped his head back on the cushions again. The signalman's conversation had curiously touched him, and he thought of homes and youngsters and missuses, and how, after all had been said and done, they were the great things of the world.

Very soon afterwards the dawn had broken and he saw the suburbs of London, grey and listless, and a little foggy in the morning light. Then the approach to Euston, and people beginning to move in the train, putting on hard hats in lieu of soft ones, and collecting luggage and yawning and pulling themselves together after hours of conditions about as unnatural to what was primitive in them as they could well be subjected to.

Gilmour pulled himself together, too, and prepared to act with concentration upon the business at hand. He had no luggage, and as the train came to a standstill in the dull, cold station, he leapt out and commenced to walk rapidly down the platform.

He had walked less than a dozen yards when a short, stout man ran up to him, and he recognised Mr. Joseph Martin.

"Mr. Green——" Martin began.

"What have you done?" asked Gilmour quickly. "Have you found her?"

And Mr. Martin admitted that he had not. He thought it best to meet the train which Mr. Green had indicated, and know a little more than the telegram had told him.

Gilmour realised that it was for ever like this. Ninety-nine people out of a hundred always wanted to know a little more before they took action about anything, and thus it was that the precipitous and active scoundrel always did get the best of the cautious and unimaginative saint.

"You've done nothing whatever then?" he asked savagely.

✓ "I didn't see what I could do. I didn't get your wire until after eight, and you said that you would be

at Euston by the first train. I thought I couldn't do anything better than wait and see you."

It was at this moment that Miss Silby came up to them.

"You'll remember me, Mr. Gilmour," she announced.

"What do you want?"

Miss Silby delivered her message, and told of Irene's confession that she was "very sick;" she pointed to a fine, large car that was standing in the station yard as a kind of peroration to her announcement.

"You can reach Eastbourne between six and seven o'clock," she urged him. "Don't disappoint Miss Goldstone."

Gilmour was not at all satisfied that here might not lie some elaborate treachery, and he said as much.

Miss Silby was very hurt. She was in a position to say that Miss Goldstone had ordered Lord Inkerman, Lees and Bridges out of her office. She was working entirely in the interests of Iris Lees now.

Martin listened attentively, but entirely in the dark. Gilmour turned to him.

"There's a car here to take me to Eastbourne. Get in, please. We'll talk on the road."

Mr. Martin obeyed, but with the manner of one who refused. He did not in the least wish to go to Eastbourne without knowing more, but he obeyed mechanically. Miss Silby also took a seat, for she was fond of motor driving and had looked forward to the excursion. It was only a few minutes after four o'clock when they bore away out of London.

CHAPTER XXVII

The Fifth Day and the Last. The Grey Car again—Pursuit and Catastrophe—Gilmour at last meets Iris herself and sees a final Placard.

GILMOUR was getting tired of travelling, but it was at least an exhilarating experience. This was Saturday morning, and since he had left Hendon with Edgar Curtis on Thursday morning he had been continuously moving.

When they had settled down into the country roads he told Mr. Martin everything, and that gentleman was very startled, indignant, solicitous and grateful. He said that Lees had adopted his daughter under some other name, and had altogether acted very badly. He, Martin, had certainly accepted money for the child and agreed to a complete surrender, but it was not the name "Lees" that had been given him at the time, and he would have the law well on his side. He was very sorry that he had turned Iris away, but he had had his son's reputation to think of. It was a most extraordinary affair altogether. He had felt a remarkable interest in the girl from the first moment that he saw her, and for the future he would respect feelings of that sort.

The worst of Mr. Martin was that he took an irritating interest in the association of Lord Inkerman with the case. He was furious at the idea of his daughter

being married to a valet, but seemed to derive some peculiar satisfaction from the fact that a lord was, in however unworthy a light, connected with the attempt. He promised, however, that he would stand by Gilmour through thick and thin. He was sure that Gilmour was a very worthy young man, and, since his daughter wished it, they should certainly be married. She should have whoever she liked, he would not stand in her light for a moment.

Gilmour had hoped that Miss Silby might at least have news that the boarding-school had been discovered, but it was not so. Miss Goldstone had telephoned to her at midnight that she had been unsuccessful and had apparently centred her hopes on Gilmour himself knowing something.

They were making good speed along the empty country roads, and, there being much to talk of, the time and mileage passed quickly. It was exactly a quarter to six when they dashed by a hand-post on which Gilmour read the words, "Eastbourne five miles."

"Here she is," exclaimed Miss Silby, at almost the same moment, and down the road, walking towards them, they espied Irene.

The car drew up beside her, and she climbed in, looking a little apprehensively at Gilmour.

"Have you any news?" he demanded of her.

She had none. She had been unable to do anything at all. Surely Mr. Gilmour knew the address of the school.

"I've never felt so absolutely at sea in my life as I have in this town," she exclaimed, as the car went on. "Here's three of us now, and this gentleman whom you haven't introduced me to, apparently utterly help-

less. To find a needle in a hayrick would be child's play to finding a girl in a boarding-school if you don't happen to know her address. It's a thing you can't ask questions about. I tried personal inquiries at about a dozen schools between nine and ten last night, and in every case I was referred to the headmistress, who told me that she couldn't possibly answer so impertinent a question. A young lady of the name might or might not be in her establishment, only the actual parent could be recognised in such a matter at all. The situation has been an entirely impossible one."

Gilmour introduced Mr. Martin, and explained his surprising identity. Irene agreed that the position was tremendously simplified, or rather that it would be, if Iris could be discovered. The danger was being too late—finding her actually married, because marriage was a thing that it was next to impossible to upset afterwards.

"I'm not afraid of a marriage," Gilmour told her. "I know the girl better now than I did—well—three or four days ago, and she would die before she'd marry that man's valet. My chief concern is to spare her from annoyance, and to find her for myself now. There's no danger of the marriage."

Irene told him that the idea of wedding her to the man Francis had been dropped, and that it was Bridges who was his rival—Bridges, with Lord Inkerman's consent.

Gilmour laughed serenely, and the laugh was still on his lips when the driver of their car swerved his wheels violently to the left and from round a bend in the road appeared a huge grey motor, travelling at a speed that could scarcely have been less than fifty miles an hour.

Gilmour and Irene both leapt to their feet and stared wildly as the car flashed past them. There was a moment of silence and then Gilmour shouted to the chauffeur:

"Stop! Turn your car!"

The engines slowed down and the man looked back.

"Turn your car, do your hear? That one that's just past! Catch it up! Don't lose a second, man!"

It was no matter of moments turning their great vehicle in the road. Gilmour watched breathlessly, as it was sent with maddening slowness to rights. The carriage was of abnormal length and it took manœuvre after manœuvre to accomplish the feat. A foot forward a foot backwards, a foot forward again; but at last the bonnet pointed north and they were racing away down the smooth, sandy road.

Neither Gilmour nor Irene had as yet exchanged a word, but now they commenced to speak in broken sentences.

"It was her!"

"Yes—I saw her."

"She was at the back."

"Yes—between Lees and Inkerman."

"They didn't see us."

"No. They never looked."

"They've got a frightful start now."

"We might do it, though."

"Yes."

Their chauffeur had settled down to enjoy the fun steadily. He was a master of his car, and it was still early morning. He knew those Marchant cars and was gratified at being able to pit himself against one.

The speed was almost too breathless for conversation. Martin was terrified, but Irene was seated

between himself and Gilmour and he disliked appealing to a woman.

They ran for a quarter of an hour in dead silence, on a still empty track. Ahead of them there was no sight or sign of the other car, but they knew that nothing on the road could move faster than they were moving now. The gently poised springs of the cushions took on themselves a roll like the roll of a ship and at the curves of the road the whole body of the vehicle keeled dangerously.

"There they are," called Gilmour, as they swept up a hill, skimmed over the brow of it, and sank beyond.

Away, not more than two miles down the road, the grey car was skudding before them, half hidden by its cloud of dust.

Their own chauffeur had seen it also, and sat like a sphinx while the engines trembled and purred and throbbed, and only the wind made sound.

It was a wonderful ride, favoured by an entirely trafficless road. A clock under the wind screen showed that it was still only a few minutes after six o'clock, and for ten miles they raced on. Twelve miles, and then they began to come upon Lewes, and step by step the speed came down until they ran through the streets within the legal limit.

So far the grey car had seemed to keep its start of them exactly. Sometimes it had been lost to view for miles at a stretch, but always when it had hove into sight again it had seemed to be precisely in the same place, like a thing motionless or suspended.

Gilmour would have taken the town at sixty miles an hour, but the chauffeur was keeping his head, and as soon as the paved streets had become country roads

again the engines began to purr once more as they rushed on.

"We've lost ten miles," Gilmour groaned, but an instant later and there was the grey car again, precisely the same distance ahead of them.

"It's simply a matter," shouted Irene in his ear, "of keeping out of an accident. It might happen to them or to us. We're all right if we can only keep our wheels."

She had hardly spoken when the vehicle seemed to have been struck by a shell. There was a report like the detonation of shrapnel and the whole car swerved sideways down the road, with a list on her that threw Irene on to Mr. Martin and Gilmour, and Miss Silby on to the pair of them, clutching at the hood above them for support. It had happened instantaneously. They felt the car plunging from right to left as the chauffeur tried grimly to keep the road, and the next instant he had pulled up at right angles to the hedges.

To be motionless and intact was for the moment sufficient. Then Gilmour got his feet on to the road and groaned aloud.

The chauffeur had gone round to his damaged wheel, pale but smiling. He was very well pleased with himself on the whole. Mr. Martin was breathless and furious, Miss Silby was laughing, as the only alternative to tears.

"Well, we've done it now," said Irene with resignation. "Say, chauffeur, it's not more than the tyre?"

"That's all," said the man, gazing with genuine admiration at a string of rubber ribbons. "We'll be on the road again before very long, if one of the gentlemen will help me with the jack."

Gilmour took off his coat, but Martin refused to

assist. He refused also to re-enter the car if they were not going to travel at what he called a reasonable speed. The chauffeur winked at Gilmour and said he'd had enough racing himself for that day, and it was not long before the spare wheel was in its place and they were bowling away again.

But the hour for fast speed had already gone by. Even policemen were to be observed abroad, and they travelled on, fast when it could be risked reasonably, but at a speed which carried them through Redhill long after it was eight o'clock.

They stopped in the High Street and asked a policeman for news of the grey car. The policeman said he would like news himself. It had gone through the town at ten minutes past seven at thirty miles an hour. Irene told him that there had nearly been a collision and that such reckless driving deserved drastic punishment. Then they moved on again.

She had already decided with Gilmour that Brentford and Inkerman Hall must be their destination, and after Redhill they bore away for Kingston and Richmond.

But only just outside Ewell they were stopped again. Irene was prepared to swear that the speed was not excessive, as a policeman held his hand aloft in mid-road.

They were not to be charged, however, with any crime against the laws of the King's highway.

Had they happened to see a large grey car travelling north, or catch the number of it? It had knocked over a milk truck about an hour before.

They had seen it, but knew nothing about it, they assured him. Five minutes were wasted in answering further questions, and then they got under way again.

It was with no precise notion of what they were to do that they presently turned through the lodge gates of Inkerman Hall and found a little crowd of sight-seers gathered about it. The gates had been thrown wide open, and the lodgekeeper himself smiled a rubific smile as they rolled past him.

"What on earth's happening?" asked Gilmour, as he saw a fresh crowd outside the portals of the Hall itself, and recognised among them even his old friends the press photographers.

The car stopped and they alighted.

One young man in a light suit stepped up to them and lifted his hat.

"You'll be kind enough just to give me a second, I know, Mr. Gilmour," he grinned persuasively.

"What's happening?" Irene asked.

"Don't you know? Miss Lees' engagement to Lord Inkerman's son has just been announced."

"What?"

"They've only just gone in. Beautiful story— isn't it? I'm not going to keep you a moment, Mr. Gilmour."

The young man stepped back and levelled his instrument at Gilmour's face. He leapt away from him, and, followed by Irene, Miss Silby and Joseph Martin, went up the steps of the house."

"What name, sir?" asked a giant of gold and plush.

"Miss Goldstone and friends," answered Irene for him, and they were ushered into a room.

Gilmour had not spoken. He was staring rather wildly about him. Martin was trembling from head to foot.

A door opened, and then Iris herself entered.

She was smiling, a little shyly, a little embarrassed a revelation of complete and adorable-looking woman.

hood; her cheeks burning, her eyes full of life and the joy of it. Gilmour stammered and trembled and his own eyes faltered, quitting her glowing face and falling to where her dress moved with a rapid breathing.

"Oh, Mr. Gilmour!" she exclaimed, "I do hope you won't think me very horrid, but I haven't had a chance to explain, have I?"

"To explain what?"

"Well you see, all the trouble arose because I thought Francis didn't really mean to marry me, and a girl must look after herself, mustn't she? He's been so honourable, and everybody's been so nice. I'm sure you won't be horrid to me. You can't tell how happy I am."

"You little——"

Gilmour checked himself and literally swallowed the unspoken word.

"But a girl must look after herself," Iris repeated.

"You've all been awfully kind—you've all helped me. Even Mr. Martin helped me."

"My dear child," Martin suddenly blurted out. "My dear, blessed child—to think that you have come to this—the wife of a peer's son—my dear girl—"

"I shouldn't tell her," Gilmour protested. "Martin, don't say a word. She can't marry without your consent."

"If I can't speak to my own daughter——"

Mr. Martin was shouting back at him.

"My dear child—don't you know me—don't you remember——?"

Gilmour obeyed when Irene took his coat sleeve and led him out of the room

He walked through a line of cameras and re-entered the motor with the docility of an ill child.

"Now, don't you worry," Irene whispered to him as the car started off under directions to head for Chancery Lane. "You've made one friend, anyhow. It's early, but you're going to come right home with me and have breakfast. Not a word now."

Gilmour sat listlessly in his seat. He was even listless when they passed a newspaper placard and read on it the words :

PIMLICO ABDUCTION ROMANTIC SEQUEL

* * * * *

It was not for Gilmour to guess that the sequel, so far as he was concerned, might yet be romantic; that out of those five days of preposterous adventure some good to himself might yet come.

Irene sat by his side, and the woman that was in her, stole into her face. Through all those close-knit hours of business concentration it had been hidden, but it was there now—just the warm, plastic soul of womanhood, tender and kind, as the soul of womanhood is. Very near to the disciplined little mouth was the tremble which preceeds tears.

Gilmour looked abruptly towards her, and she drew herself up with a kind of languor, as children wake from sleep.

"My!" she said, slowly. "My, don't we all wear these brass faces, when one comes to think of it, Mr. Gilmour? Aren't we all for our own ends? It's only when our selfishness happens to be right that things

end well, but we are selfish, just the same. Life looks like a mosaic of little meannesses, but I like to think that it's better than that, that sometimes Fate, the workman, drops two precious stones together, two good purposes. You're none the worse for your trying—nobody's the worse for that. All that matters is just having the luck for things to work out right. They often do in the end you know."

And Gilmour still looked across at her, with the first inception of a new idea struggling for birth in his bewildered brain. The hope-light was beginning already to dawn there.

THE END.

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